Brand Attachment as a Limitation on Customer Prioritization Strategies

by

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Abstract

The marketing literature suggests that the existence of a strong customer attachment to a brand has the potential to bring increased profitability to that brand. While there is certainly the potential for positive benefits, the premise of this thesis is that there is also potential for negative outcomes, including limiting the implementation of other profit seeking strategies (such as customer prioritization strategies) for the brand. I argue that the reason for the expected detrimental effects arises because customers with strong brand attachment often develop a necessity to maintain their perceived brand-self distance, which leads them to constantly assess company actions. When a company’s actions (such as the implementation of customer prioritization strategies) result in a perceived increase in brand-self distance (feeling of being farther away from the brand) for the customer, thereby threatening his/her relationship with the brand, customers with a strong brand attachment are likely to increase their intentions to engage in not only positive behaviours for the brand as previously believed (e.g. repurchase behaviours, paying price premiums etc., Park et.al, 2013), but also neutral and negative behaviours such as retaliatory actions against the brand (by spreading negative word-of-mouth, engaging in problem solving complaining, ending brand relationship etc.) in order to restore or increase their brand-self distance. Contributions and managerial implications are further discussed.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Consider two recent articles about Apple: The first states, “With demand high for Apple's new smart watch yet limited availability, many Apple fans are willing to pay much higher prices. One eBayer is selling his £339 Apple Watch Sport and has already received bids of over £1,100” (UK Daily Star, 2015). The second states, “Apple fans have taken their complaints to Twitter claiming their smartphone bends in their pocket” (UK Express, 2014). While the former example is one that often appears in the current literature on brand attachment, the latter receives considerably less attention. Given that in the second situation strongly attached customers are publically complaining about the brand they care deeply for, it is very important to understand when and why such reactions can occur so as to help brands avoid these situations. In this thesis, I try to understand the limitations of strong customer attachment to brands as it relates to the second consumer situation.

Park, MacInnis and Priester (2006) define brand attachment as the strength of the cognitive and affective bond connecting the brand and the customer’s self. This attachment develops and increases over time as the customer’s self expands to include and encompass the brand. Park et al.’s (2006) research suggests that having customers with strong brand attachment can be especially profitable for that brand. The logic is that if a company can connect its brand with a customer’s self-concept, the company will benefit from repeat purchases, protection from brand defections, increased positive word of mouth and an increased willingness to pay price premiums (Park, Macinnis, Priester and Iacobucci, 2010). It is not surprising, therefore, to find researchers suggesting that managers discover and promote various aspects of a brand to which
customers can begin to develop stronger attachments.

While there are many benefits documented in the literature that may accrue to a company actively trying to develop stronger brand attachments among customers, there are very few researchers who examine what, if any, limitations may result. One exception is Johnson, Matear and Thomson (2011) who demonstrate that if the relationship between a customer and the brand dissolves (for a variety of reasons such as customers “growing out of” brands, etc.), those customers whose self-concept previously encompassed the brand often become the worst retaliators against the brand. The focus of Johnson et al.’s (2011) research is primarily on the limitations of the effects of a previously strong brand attachment in an already dissolved customer-brand relationship. Currently, there is a noticeable absence of work examining the limitations of brand attachment in an ongoing relationship between a company and its customers with strong brand attachment.

The context of ongoing relationships provides a useful set up in which to examine brand attachment and associated limitations over time as the relationship between the customer and the brand changes. In this context, companies constantly implement various customer-related strategies and actions, adjusting policies and corresponding treatments. At the same time, customers who have a relationship with the brand on their own may, through time, develop a strong brand attachment. In this thesis, I explore how customers who develop a strong attachment to a brand react immediately after brand changes implemented by the company. To understand these reactions, I first discuss the concept of brand attachment and the behavioral and motivational mechanisms associated with it.

Current understanding suggests that the stronger the customers’ attachment to the brand, the closer customers perceive themselves to the brand (Park et. al. 2013). The extent of perceived
distance between the brand and the customers’ self is called *perceived brand-self distance*. This perceived brand-self distance is viewed as a stable construct that corresponds to the degree of customers’ brand attachment.

Once customers develop strong brand attachment, the degree of that attachment can change over time as a result of the customers’ brand experiences. The reason for this is because customers’ strong brand attachments appear to underlie their continuous goal pursuit and customers tend to maintain this attachment until it is necessary to revise it. For instance, a customer may become strongly attached to Apple because it allows him/her to continuously pursue a goal of being creative and this customer’s degree of brand attachment will likely remain the same so that he/she can continuously achieve the goal of being creative. However, at some point in time in the relationship with Apple, this customer may also feel a necessity to revise his/her degree of brand attachment to Apple. This will likely happen when he/she can no longer (to the same extent) continuously pursue the goal of being creative when using the Apple brand.

Customers with strong brand attachment also develop strong motivational mechanisms including *proximity maintenance* (desire to maintain brand-self distance), avoidance of separation anxiety (avoidance of feeling anxious when the brand is removed or distant), and a strong pro-brand orientation (e.g. psychological biases towards the brand) (Bowlby, 1979; Hazan and Shaver, 1994; Feeney and Noller, 1996; Mikulincer and Shaver 2007; Thomson et al. 2005). The literature on brand attachment suggests that these motivational mechanisms further trigger behavioral implications. For instance, a desire to maintain brand-self distance may lead to repeat purchases of the brand and willingness to pay price premiums (Park, MacInnis, and Priester, 2006). Similarly, separation distress may lead to feelings of anxiety when the brand is removed or when the relationship is ended by the brand (Johnson, Matear and Thompson, 2011). In
addition, a strong pro-brand orientation may lead to behaviors such as spreading positive word of mouth and displaying the brand to others (Johnson and Rusbult, 1989; Van Lange et al., 1997).

In this thesis, I investigate the limitation of brand attachment stemming from one of the motivational mechanisms of brand attachment – the necessity to maintain brand-self distance. There are many perceptions of brand-self distance, which at any point in time provide feedback as to whether one is feeling closer or further away from the brand. As a result, these perceptions also trigger a motivation to act upon any perceived changes to the brand-self distance.

The investigation of limitations to strong brand attachment is important for the understanding of the consequences of strong customer attachment to brands. For example, I expect that increases to brand-self distance will trigger reassessment and eventually either lead to an increase or decrease in motivation to restore this distance. These changes in motivation may, in turn, lead to an increase in behavioral intentions to not only act positively towards the brand (as per Park et.al, 2013) but also to act harmfully towards the brand including engaging in retaliatory actions, complaining, and relationship dissolution.

Consider the following example: A customer initially signs up as a first time Apple customer. Over time, this customer develops a strong brand attachment to Apple with an accompanying perceived brand-self distance to Apple. At a later point in time, however, Apple implements changes to their customer offerings making this customer ineligible to obtain a new accessory for their Apple product. As a result, that customer may immediately perceive an increase to his/her brand-self distance and a threat to his/her relationship with Apple. This threat then triggers a reassessment of his/her brand-self distance leading to either an increase or decrease in the motivation to restore brand-self distance.
In the above example, a customer with strong brand attachment may blame the brand, blame himself/herself or blame other factors for the perceived changes to his or her brand-self distance. For instance, the customer may feel that this new accessory was not available because Apple decided to show appreciation for their most valuable customers only (the customer blames the brand) or because the customer herself forgot to register with the app store (the customer blames herself) or because the accessory developer made it available only to a handful of randomly selected customers (the customer blames other factors). In accordance with previous literature on attribution of blame (e.g. Weiner, 1980; Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Folkes et al., 1987; Folkes and Kotsos, 1986), I expect that when customers blame the brand as opposed to the self or other factors for the perceived changes to their brand-self distance, they will perceive this situation as more threatening to the relationship with the brand due to perceived intentionality, which I address later in this thesis.

In addition, the immediate changes in a company’s actions (such as the above introduction of Apple’s new accessory) may also be assessed on the extent to which the brand maintains a related concept associated with brand attachment, self-relevance. The extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance is defined here as the extent to which the customer identifies with the perceived brand changes (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Einwiller et al. 2006; Luhtanen and Crocker 1992). Imagine that in the above example, the customer with a strong brand attachment to Apple uses Apple products because they feel it allows him/her to pursue a goal of being creative. If he/she perceives Apple’s new accessory as not relevant for achieving that goal, then the new accessory introduction goes against the goals associated with the customer’s brand attachment (e.g. customer is attached to Apple because he/she feels creative when using the brand) and results in a perception of low self-relevance.
Since the customer will no longer be able to pursue a goal of being creative to the same extent as he/she could before this accessory introduction, this should also be perceived as a threat to his/her relationship with Apple.

In this thesis I argue that customers with strong brand attachment will feel a threat to their relationship with the attached brand when they perceive an increase to their brand-self distance, blame the brand for perceived changes in brand-self distance and assess brand changes low on self-relevance. The perceived threat will further trigger the motivation to either restore or increase brand-self distance through behavioral intentions such as: customers’ demanding improved treatment from the brand; revengeful behaviors against the brand (if customers feel that the restoration of brand-self distance is unlikely); behavioral intentions to do nothing and/or forgive the brand; and customers’ willingness to pay more for the brand to receive the extra accessory. Thus, motivation to maintain brand-self distance among customers with a strong brand attachment may lead to not only positive repurchase intentions and willingness to pay price premiums as previously believed (Park et. al, 2010), but also potentially to neutral and negative behavioral intentions such as doing nothing, retaliatory actions, relationship dissolution and defensive mechanisms.

Understanding these limitations of strong brand attachment, as they relate to the necessity to maintain brand-self distance, provides insight as to how a company may be able to prevent the emergence of potentially harmful behaviors for the brand such as customer retaliatory actions and relationship dissolution from customers who care about their brand the most. In this context, this thesis begins to address the following primary research question: “What are the potential limitations and negative outcomes of strong customer-brand attachment as it relates to the necessity to maintain brand-self distance in an ongoing company-customer relationship?” To
address this primary research question, it is important to examine a secondary question of this research: “What kinds of company actions may constitute perceived changes to brand-self distance?”

In this dissertation I focus on company actions as they relate to changes in customer offerings. Companies may vary and change these offerings over time as relationship between the customer and the brand progresses. Customers with strong brand attachment may perceive these changes in company’s offerings as relevant to their perceived brand-self distance, threatening their relationship with the brand. I do not consider company actions as they relate to changes in brand image or corporate actions at a broader and more stable level. Although such actions are relevant to perceived changes to brand-self distance (e.g. changes in packaging, brand positioning, brand actions associated with corporate social responsibility), I focus my research by concentrating on company actions as they relate to the immediate perceived changes in customer offerings.

One context in which the immediate perceived changes to brand-self distance could arise is when a company implements customer prioritization strategies, creating a situation in which customers with strong brand attachments feel that the company’s actions are inconsistent with his or her brand-self distance. Customer prioritization strategies are widely used strategies with the potential to be highly profitable. Particularly, in customer prioritization strategies, companies separate customers into groupings based on an estimated lifetime worth (Zeithaml, Rust, and Lemon, 2001) and gain efficiency by concentrating on serving only the most profitable (high priority) customers while spending less energy and resources on low priority customers.

Based on the literature on social comparison (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Tesser, 1991; Carver, 2004; Higgins, 1987) and social self (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Dutton and Jackson,
1987; Hogg 2003; Jackson and Dutton, 1988; Tajfel and Turner 1986), I argue that customer prioritization strategies create situations of perceived inequities among customer groups that can lead to a situation in which a customer judges a company’s treatment in light of his or her brand-self distance and feels the company falls short, perceiving an increase to his/her brand-self distance (feeling farther away from the brand). Consequently, the larger the change the customers perceive to their brand-self distance, as a result of company actions, the greater they perceive the threat to their relationship with the brand.

I also argue that the extent to which a brand maintains self-relevance will also play a role in determining the degree to which customers with a strong brand attachment perceive a threat to their relationship with the brand. When customers have a low identification (low self-relevance) with the perceived brand changes, they no longer feel that the brand is part of who they are to the extent it was and also identify with the brand to a lesser extent. They also perceive the brand now begins to hinder their continuous goal pursuit, and start to feel that they no longer share the same values with the brand as they used to. This leads to a perceived threat to the customer brand relationship.

In addition to the perceived changes to brand-self distance and self-relevance, I suggest that a strongly attached customer will also likely make attributions of blame for these perceived changes. This customer may either blame the brand, him/herself or other factors for his/her perceived changes to brand-self distance. Considering previous literature on attribution of blame (e.g. Weiner, 1980; Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Folkes et al., 1987 and Folkes & Kotsos, 1986) in the context of a customer prioritization strategy, I posit that when companies provide a clear standard by which customers can blame the brand vs. themselves or other factors for the
implementation of the customer prioritization strategy, the customers are more likely to perceive a greater threat to their relationship with the brand.

In sum, different offerings tailored to different customer groups under a customer prioritization strategy could lead to perceived changes to brand-self distance among customers with a strong brand attachment. The perceived changes to brand-self distance (small vs. large) along with the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance (high vs. low) and attribution of blame (self vs. brand vs. other factors) will further affect the extent of perceived threat to the customer brand relationship. Those customers who perceive a threat to the relationship with the brand will also experience distress and depending on the situation will likely feel a strong desire to restore or increase their brand-self distance. This leads to another secondary question of this research: “What factors trigger changes in motivation to restore/increase brand-self distance?”

Based on the expectancy theory of motivation (Vroom, 1984), I argue that customers with a strong brand attachment will likely be motivated to restore their brand-self distance when they believe that such restoration will lead to desirable outcomes and that their efforts to restore brand-self distance will likely lead to its restoration. In this thesis, desirable outcomes are the customers’ ability to continuously pursue goals associated with their attachment/desire to feel close to the brand. Further, when a brand maintains high self-relevance after a change (e.g. new accessory introduction is highly desirable by the customer), customers with a strong brand attachment also maintain a strong identity with the brand after changes, accelerating their continuous goal pursuit associated with their brand attachment. Since the outcome of this continuous goal pursuit is highly desirable, customers will likely increase their motivation to restore brand-self distance. However, when a brand results in lower self-relevance after a change (e.g. new accessory introduction is not desirable by the customer), a customer with strong brand
attachment may decrease their identity with the brand. This, in turn, will make it more difficult to pursue self-relevant goals, triggering a decrease in motivation to restore brand-self distance.

Another instance in which customers with a strong brand attachment may feel that they are no longer able to pursue their goals to the same extent and/or feel close to the brand is when they believe that their effort to restore brand-self distance will not be sufficient in its restoration and, thus, the ability to pursue their goals associated with that attachment/feeling of closeness will be hindered. Again, these expectations are in line with previous research on motivation. According to the expectancy theory of motivation (Vroom, 1984), the increase in motivation to act is highly dependent on the extent to which one feels that his/her efforts will lead to the desired outcomes, in this case, their ability to continuously pursue goals associated with their brand attachment. Similarly, I predict that the extent to which a customer perceives he/she is likely to restore brand-self distance (i.e., perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance) will positively affect the extent of his/her motivation to restore it.

The extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance, the perceived threat to customer brand relationship and the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance will all play a role in determining changes (increase/decrease) in motivation to restore brand-self distance. But why are these changes important? This brings me to the final secondary question of this thesis: “How does motivation to restore brand-self distance affect the type of behavioural intentions of customers with strong brand attachment?”

Here, I argue that the changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance and the attribution of blame for the perceived change to brand-self distance are expected to drive the difference in the type of behavioural intentions among customers with strong brand attachment. It is very important to investigate such behavioural intentions, as they constitute limitations of
strong customer brand attachments. This investigation also helps managers understand how customers with a strong brand attachment may need to be treated in order to keep them satisfied.

1.2 Main Contributions.

The literature on brand attachment (e.g. Park et. al, 2010) focuses primarily on the benefits that the attachment brings to the brand. In contrast, my proposed research contributes to the literature on brand attachment by examining the limitations of brand attachment as it relates to the necessity to maintain brand-self distance in the context of ongoing relationships. The examined limitations stem from the fact that customers develop this necessity to maintain perceived brand-self distance in order to avoid feelings of separation distress. I argue that this necessity leads customers with a strong brand attachment to carefully process information, to assess a company’s actions as a means to monitor their brand-self distance. When a customer perceives an increase in brand-self distance (feeling of being farther away from the brand) as a result of company actions, he/she may feel a threat to his/her relationship with the brand.

I also argue that such perceived threats to customer brand relationship under different conditions will likely lead to either an increase or decrease in motivation to restore brand-self distance. While previous research (Park et.al, 2010) on brand attachment outlines the mechanism of brand-self distance maintenance through engagement in positive brand directed activities, in this research I argue that there is also the possibility for a mechanism of brand-self distance maintenance through negative and neutral brand directed activities. These negative and neutral activities include increasing intentions to engage in complaining, doing nothing, retaliating against the brand, and demanding better treatment from the brand. Understanding these potential retaliatory activities is important and needs to be considered by managers, as these carry
potentially costly negative consequences arising due to the necessity of customers with a strong
brand attachment to maintain brand-self distance.

My research also contributes to the literature by highlighting ongoing customer
prioritization strategy implementation as one context in which such perceptions of increased
brand self-distance may arise. Companies constantly implement customer prioritization strategies
based on economic benefits, concentrating on customers yielding the highest revenue. However,
customers form perceptions of their brand-self distance based on their own experience with the
brand and comparisons to others, regardless of whether they belong to high or low priority
groups, and strive to maintain these perceptions on an ongoing basis. Thus, when a customer
prioritization strategy is implemented on a continuous basis, companies should take into account
the fact that customers with a strong brand attachment develop the necessity to maintain brand-
self distance.

While the literature on customer prioritization strategies outlines its benefits and
shortcomings from a profitability perspective (Homburg, 2008), the research in this thesis also
contributes to the literature by taking a consumer behavior perspective to identify behavioral
outcomes of customer prioritization strategies. Specifically, ongoing customer prioritization
strategy implementation can lead to a situation in which a customer develops his or her
expectations of what a company should do based on his or her perceived brand-self distance. I
suggest that the customer may also conclude that the company falls short, leading to widening
perceptions of brand-self distance, even to the extent of threatening the customer brand
relationship and motivating negative brand directed activities.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

1. Overview.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the potential limitations and negative outcomes of strong customer attachment to brand as it relates to the necessity to maintain brand-self distance in ongoing company-customer relationships. To further investigate this primary research question I review the relevant literature, which also helps to formulate the secondary questions related to my primary research question.

In this chapter, I begin with a review of the literature on brand attachment (e.g. Park et. al., 2010). This literature is concerned with situations when customers are able to maintain brand-self distance, whereas I explore situations in which brand-self distance is not maintained. To accomplish this, I draw on the literature on perceived threats to customer brand relationships (e.g. Baumeister and Leary 1995; Leary 2001; Tyler and Lind 1992). This literature is helpful for understanding the situations in which customers’ perceived brand-self distance is not maintained. In these situations, I argue that customers can experience threats to their relationship with the brand, triggering a reassessment of brand-self distance and eventually an increase or decrease in the motivation to restore it. This can then not only increase the possibility for positive repurchase behaviors and willingness to pay price premiums (Park et. al, 2006) but also for negative behaviors such as retaliatory actions, demands of free treatment and defensive mechanisms, especially among customers with a strong brand attachment. I begin my review with a discussion of brand attachment.
2. Brand Attachment.

2.1 Brand Attachment and Brand-self Distance

Strong brand attachments develop over time as the relationship between the customer and the brand evolves. Through time, a cognitive reorganization takes place such that for some customers the self expands to include the brand (Park, MacInnis and Priester, 2006). These customers are likely to also develop a strong positive feeling of oneness with the brand (Aron et al., 1992) and view the brand’s resources as their own (Mittal, 2006).

For example, when making a choice of a product/service, a potential customer does not necessarily have any experience using the brand, and can only imagine how it will actually work or feel. Once the customer starts to use the brand, the customer begins an engagement in what could be considered an ongoing, dynamic process of interpreting brand meaning. This interpretation of brand meaning could lead to the development of brand attachment over time.

In this thesis, I adopt the definition of brand attachment proposed by Park, MacInnis and Priester (2006). That is, brand attachment is “the strength of the cognitive and affective bond connecting the brand and the self.” Two critical factors reflect the conceptual properties of brand attachment: brand-self connection and brand prominence. Brand-self connection is the cognitive and emotional connection between the individual and the self (Chaplin and Roedder, 2005; Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Escalas, 2004). Brand prominence is the extent to which positive feelings and memories about the attachment object are perceived to be top of mind (Park, Mac Innis and Priester, 2006). It is important that both components of brand attachment be present to result in an overall stronger brand attachment (Park et al., 2010).

There are different conceptualizations of brand attachment including emotional brand
attachment (Thomson et. al., 2005), which refers to the bond that connects a customer with a specific brand and involves feelings toward the brand, feelings such as affection, passion, and connection (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). While this conceptualization is often used, in this thesis I, instead, adopt Park et. al.’s (2006) conceptualization of brand attachment primarily for the reason that it incorporates a brand prominence component.

Specifically, when brand thoughts and feelings are top of mind, this prominence may pose a disproportionately strong influence on decision-making (Alba and Marmorstein, 1987). Customers for whom both components of brand attachment are strong may be much more likely to engage in relationship-sustaining behaviours (e.g. willingness to pay a price premium, engage in repeat purchases, spread positive word of mouth) than those for whom the brand-self connection is strong but brand prominence is weak. In this light, I believe it is, therefore, necessary to include both components of brand attachment as relationship-sustaining activities constitute the context of this thesis. This conceptualization of brand attachment will also have a myriad of emotions that are associated with cognitive mechanisms of brand attachment and these emotions will be specific to each individual and his/her relationship with the brand.

Park et al. (2006) also suggest that once customers develop a strong brand attachment, the degree of that attachment can be changed over time through the customers’ brand experience. The reason for this is that a customer’s strong brand attachment underlies his/her continuous goal pursuit and therefore he/she tends to hold on to it for a period of time until it is necessary to revise it. For instance, a customer may become strongly attached to Apple because it allows him/her to continuously pursue a goal of being creative. This customer’s degree of brand attachment will likely stay the same for a while so that he/she can continuously pursue and achieve the goal of being creative. However, at some point in time in the relationship with Apple,
This customer may also feel a necessity to revise his/her degree of brand attachment. This will likely happen when he/she can no longer (to the same extent) continuously pursue and achieve the goal of being creative when using the Apple brand.

This literature also suggests that the stronger a customer’s attachment to the brand, the closer the customer perceives himself or herself to the brand (Park et al., 2013). This extent of perceived distance between the brand and the customer’s self is called the *perceived brand-self distance*. This perceived brand-self distance is viewed as a stable construct that corresponds to the degree of customers’ brand attachment.

Research on interpersonal attachment indicates that once formed, strong attachment with a person or an object leads people to also develop strong motivational and behavioural outcomes such as the maintenance of perceived distance to the attached object/person (i.e, the desire to be close to the attachment object/person), separation distress (the anxiety experienced when the object/person is removed), and strong pro-attachment object orientations (Bowlby, 1979; Hazan and Shaver, 1994; Feeney and Noller, 1996).

Bowlby (1988) defines the maintenance of perceived distance as a desire to be near the people/objects to which one is attached. While Bowlby’s (1988) definition mostly reflects the necessity to maintain perceived distance to an attached person/object in a physical manner, additional work in attachment theory (Fraley and Shaver, 1998; Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, Fleming, and Gamble, 1993; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Shaver et al., 1988) also discusses the necessity to maintain the psychological perceived distance to an attached person/object.

Maintaining a certain level of perceived distance to an attached person/object confers security and facilitates successful achievement of self-relevant goals (Hazan and Zeifman, 1999; Thomson et. al., 2005). In the interpersonal context, this maintenance occurs through monitoring
and appraising events for their relevance to the attachment person's physical or psychological distance, availability, and responsiveness (Fraley and Shaver, 1998; Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, Fleming, and Gamble, 1993; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Shaver et al., 1988).

Similar findings appear in the literature on brand attachment. Specifically, customers with a strong brand attachment also develop strong motivational mechanisms such as the maintenance of perceived brand-self distance (the desire to maintain brand-self distance), the avoidance of separation anxiety (the avoidance of feeling anxious when the brand is removed or distant), and a strong pro-brand orientation (e.g. psychological biases towards the brand) (Park, MacInnis, and Priester, 2006). Previous research finds that these motivational mechanisms further trigger various behavioral outcomes. For instance, the desire to maintain brand-self distance may lead to repeat purchases of the brand and the willingness to pay price premiums (Park, MacInnis, and Priester, 2006); separation distress may lead to feelings of anxiety when the brand is removed or when the relationship is ended by the brand (Johnson, Matear and Thomson, 2011; Thomson, Whelan, and Johnson, 2012); a strong pro-brand orientation may lead to such behaviors as spreading positive word of mouth and displaying the brand to others (Johnson and Rusbult, 1989; Van Lange et al., 1997).

In this thesis, I investigate the limitation of brand attachment as it relates to one of the motivational mechanisms of brand attachment – the necessity to maintain brand-self distance. The investigation of this behavioural outcome of attachment is important, as if a customer with a strong brand attachment is able to maintain a certain brand-self distance, then this in turn also helps that customer to avoid feelings of separation distress with the brand and to keep their pro-brand orientation. I believe there are many perceptions of brand-self distance that are dynamic in nature. These perceptions of brand-self distance can result in feeling closer or feeling further
away (distant) from the brand, and they fluctuate with the context. Furthermore, these perceptions of brand-self distance can also trigger reassessment and, by extension, can also trigger the motivation to act upon the perceived changes to brand-self distance.

For example, strongly attached customers of Apple may perceive a decrease to their brand-self distance (a closer distance between the brand and the self) when Apple invites them to a conference with general expenses paid for. At the same time, strongly attached customers of Apple may perceive an increase to their brand-self distance (an increasing distance between the brand and the self) when Apple denies these customers the ability to leave comments on the corporate website. In this thesis I examine the latter context.

This investigation of limitations to strong brand attachment is important for understanding the consequences of strong customer attachment to brands. Increases to brand-self distance are likely to trigger reassessment of the brand-self distance and eventually either lead to an increase or decrease in motivation to restore it. Such changes in motivation may then lead to an increase in behavioral intentions to not only act positively towards the brand (as per Park et.al, 2013) but also to act harmfully towards the brand including retaliatory actions, complaining and relationship dissolution.

2.2 Brand-self Distance Maintenance and Information Processing

Customers with a strong brand attachment are likely to maintain their perceived brand-self distance (feeling of closeness to the brand) in a highly observant manner, paying more attention to customer-related company actions. This is likely because in the interpersonal context people maintain perceived distance to an attachment person/object through monitoring and appraising events for their relevance to the attachment person's physical or psychological
distance, availability, and responsiveness (Fraley and Shaver, 1998; Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, Fleming, and Gamble, 1993; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; and Shaver et al., 1988). When a person detects a discrepancy between the current perceived distance and the perceived behavior of the attachment figure in a light of this perceived distance, the individual feels anxious and becomes increasingly observant to attachment-related cues (Fraley and Shaver, 1998; Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, Fleming, and Gamble, 1993; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; and Shaver et al., 1988).

Therefore, customers with strong brand attachments might process information regarding their perceived brand-self distance in a more observant manner, taking their time to think about available options and carefully assessing any potential threat to their relationship with the brand. This careful processing of information is called systematic processing (Chaiken, Liberman and Eagly, 1989). When customers process information regarding company actions systematically, they carefully consider available options and take the time to judge various alternatives as they make judgements or choices.

On the contrary, customers with a weak brand attachment will have no need to maintain a perceived brand-self distance and the brand-self connection will be less salient. Thus, any information about perceived brand-self distance will be less relevant and might be quickly processed in a more heuristic way (Chaiken, Liberman and Eagly, 1989). When customers process heuristically, they seek to quickly process existing information and use various short-cuts or rules of thumb without having to process or assess all available alternatives or options.

It is important to understand the differences in information processing between customers with a strong and weak brand attachment because systematic processing of relevant information regarding a perceived brand-self distance makes customers with a strong brand attachment more
observant than customers with a weak brand attachment. At the same time since customers with a weak brand attachment lack the motivation to monitor perceived brand-self distance, instead using quick heuristics for assessing information regarding the brand, they are less likely than customers with a strong brand attachment to take the time to assess the different strategies that a company employs.

The necessity to maintain one’s perceived brand-self distance in a highly observant manner leads customers to continuously follow company actions as a means to monitor and maintain their perceived brand-self distance. As a result, this monitoring could then impose limitations on a company’s actions. That is, if customers with a strong brand attachment perceive a certain company’s actions as being consistent (or higher) with their perceived brand-self distance, then, as previously discussed, the company is likely to enjoy positive benefits as a result of the brand attachment. However, if the same customer perceives a company’s actions as a threat to the relationship with the brand because the assessment of company actions result in an increase in brand-self distance, then a limitation on company actions may be imposed by the strong brand attachment. Consider the example of a fitness club, in which the club does not include some customers with strong brand attachment in its new health classes, making these classes only available for super elite customers. As I argue in this thesis, these non-super elite customers are likely to perceive an increase in their brand-self distance and an increased perceived threat to their relationship with the brand.
3. Perceived Threat to the Relationship with the Brand.

3.1 Perceived Threats and Customer’s Self-Concept.

The extensive literature on self-concept generally refers to the self as a multidimensional, multifaceted dynamic structure composed of diverse self-representations, roles, social identities and goals (Markus and Wurf, 1987). One such dimension pertains to one’s relations with others and is referred to as the social self (Brewer and Gardner 1996). The social self captures an individual’s desire for connectedness to others and a sense of both acceptance and belonging (Leary et al. 1995; Brewer and Gardner 1996). It also refers to a desire to be deemed worthy as a social object as an innate and fundamental concern for one’s social self. Customers may perceive certain information as threatening when this information represents “a deep sense of vulnerability that is assumed to be negative”, threatening certain aspects of a customer’s self-concept such as the social self (Dutton & Jackson, 1987; Jackson & Dutton, 1988).

Social self is widely recognized as an important aspect of the self that is shaped through group memberships, social roles within those groups, and, more generally, assessments of standing in relation to others (e.g., Leary 2001; Tajfel 2010). Individuals are generally motivated to be valued, respected, and accepted by others (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Leary 2001; Tyler and Lind 1992), needing “to feel a satisfying and coherent involvement with the social world” (Deci and Ryan 1991, 243). As such, individuals monitor their environment to assess whether they are valued by their relational partners, to understand their social standing, and more generally, to determine their social worth. These interpersonal assessments shape their perceptions of their social self. Similarly, I believe that customers with a strong brand attachment may monitor their brand-self distance to assess whether they are a valued relational partner of the
brand in order to understand their social standing and social worth.

Specifically, in some cases, customers with a strong brand attachment may interpret a perceived increase in brand-self distance as a sign that they are not valued relational partners of the brand. In other words, they interpret these situations as evidence of low social worth, resulting in a perceived threat to the consumers’ sense of self as valued and respected individuals. Therefore, certain information could be perceived as a threat to the relationship with the brand among customers with strong brand attachment because they may feel that the brand somehow does not care about the relationship they have with it or feel that the brand deems the relationship to be inferior (i.e., a weak relationship). I call this threat a “perceived threat to the relationship with the brand”. Following are some potential triggers of this perceived threat to the relationship with the brand.

3.2 Determinants of Perceived Threat to the Relationship with the Brand as Triggers of Motivation.

Given that the perceived threat to the relationship with the brand is the extent in which customers feel that the brand deems their relationship with the brand to be inferior, it seems intuitive that company actions that are perceived to increase a customer’s immediate brand-self distance will lead to a perceived threat to the relationship with the brand. Specifically, when customers develop a strong brand attachment, they also develop a perceived brand-self distance and a necessity to maintain that distance. However, when companies’ introduce various new offerings to customers, customers with strong brand attachment may have an immediate perception of an increase to their brand-self distance. In this situation, I argue that they will also
perceive a threat to their relationship with the brand and also trigger a motivational mechanism to act upon this perceived threat.

Consider the following example: A customer initially signs up as a first time Apple customer. Over time, this customer develops a strong brand attachment to Apple with an accompanying perceived brand-self distance to Apple. At a later point in time, however, Apple implements changes to their customer offerings making this customer ineligible to obtain a new accessory for their Apple product. As a result, that customer may perceive an increase to his/her brand-self distance (a distancing from the brand) and a threat to his/her relationship with Apple. This threat then triggers a reassessment of his/her brand-self distance leading to either an increase or decrease in the motivation to restore it.

Further, in the above example, a customer with a strong brand attachment may blame the brand, blame himself/herself or blame other factors for the perceived changes to their brand-self distance. For instance, the customer may feel that this new accessory was not available because Apple decided to show appreciation for their most valuable customers only (the customer blames the brand) or because the customer forgot to register with the app store (the customer blames himself/herself) or because the app developer made it available only to a handful of randomly selected customers (the customer blames other factors). Given this, another literature that seems particularly relevant in determining the extent to which a customer perceives a threat to the relationship with the brand is the literature on attribution of blame (e.g. Weiner, 1980; Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Folkes et al., 1987 and Folkes & Kotsos, 1986). This literature broadly suggests that when customers blame the brand vs. themselves or other factors for the occurrence of negative events, it tends to exacerbate negative reactions (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). Folkes et al. (1987) and Folkes and Kotsos (1986) demonstrate how blaming the brand for service delays lead
to subsequent increases in customers’ desire to complain and negatively affected repurchase behavior.

Similarly to the above literature, I also suspect that when customers blame the brand versus themselves or other factors for perceived changes to their brand-self distance, they will likely feel higher threat to their relationship with the brand. This would happen because if customers believe that the brand made a decision to engage in deliberate actions against them, customers will likely perceive the company’s actions as more intentional, resulting in a greater perceived threat to their relationship with the brand.

Changes in a company’s actions (such as the above introduction of Apple’s new accessory) may also be assessed on the extent to which the brand maintains a related concept associated with brand attachment, *self-relevance*. Similar to previous literature, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance is defined here as the extent to which the customer identifies with the immediate perceived brand changes (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Einwiller et al. 2006; Luhtanen and Crocker 1992). Imagine that in the above example, the customer with a strong brand attachment to Apple uses Apple products because they feel it allows him/her to pursue a goal of being creative. If he/she perceives Apple’s new app as not relevant for achieving that goal, then the new app introduction goes against the goals associated with the customer’s brand attachment (e.g. customer is attached to Apple because he/she feels creative when using the brand) and results in a perception of low self-relevance. Since the consumer will no longer be able to pursue a goal of being creative to the same extent as he/she could before using this accessory, this should also be perceived as a threat to his/her relationship with Apple.
Any information that leads to low social worth is extremely aversive and activates defensive processes to protect, maintain and enhance one’s perceived social worth (Deci and Ryan 2000; Leary 2001). In the same way, the perceived threat to the customer brand relationship will trigger reassessment of a customer’s brand-self distance and eventually lead to changes in motivation to restore or increase brand-self distance. This will likely lead the customer to increase the potential for not only positive repurchase behaviors and willingness to pay price premiums (Park et al., 2010) but also for neutral and negative behaviors such as retaliatory actions, demands of extraordinary treatment and activation of defensive mechanisms among customers with strong brand attachment. This is one potential limitation of a strong customer attachment to a brand that I examine in this dissertation. To do this, however, requires a context for this investigation. To develop the context, I address the following secondary question of this research: “What kinds of company actions may constitute perceived changes to brand-self distance?” Specifically, I examine the context of customer prioritization strategies.

4. Customer Prioritization Strategy as a Perceived Threat to the Relationship with the Brand

4.1 Customer Prioritization Strategies

Customer prioritization is a strategy in which a company separates customers into prioritized groupings based on an estimated lifetime worth or other predictors of worth (Zeithaml, Rust, and Lemon, 2001). The company then offers each customer group unique, tailored offerings. Specifically, the company discriminates among customer groups by offering different prices and correspondingly treats each group differently. Companies implement these
strategies in both service (e.g. airlines, cell phones, cable) and product industries (e.g. cars, clothing, books). In the airline industry, for example, a first class ticket has a certain price and a different service level in comparison to economy class.

Companies often use customer prioritization strategies because they consider them very effective, efficient, and profitable approaches to serve the customer (Zeithaml et al., 2001). The logic is simple: companies concentrate on making the most worthwhile relationships (e.g. high-priority customer groups) the strongest relationships, whereas other relationships (e.g. low-priority customer groups) are not considered as important and therefore companies do not invest much in them. In this thesis, I define a customer priority group by the extent of customers’ financial contribution into the brand. In other words, the more a customer pays into the brand, the higher the priority group to which he/she belongs.

On the one hand, customer priority strategies are accepted practice; companies implement a differentiated use of marketing instruments for different customer groups, which in turn leads to higher company profits (Homburg, Droll, and Totzek, 2008) as marketing efforts become more effective and efficient when concentrated on high priority relationships (Rust, Lemon, and Zeithaml, 2004; Zablah, Bellenger, and Johnston, 2004). Homburg, Droll, and Totzek (2008), for example, find that customer prioritization strategies are very profitable as it makes high priority customers happiest while the lower priority customers do not necessarily mind the discrimination.

On the other hand, others find that for reasons of hedging risks (Dhar and Glazer, 2003), activating economies of scale (Johnson and Selnes, 2004), and reducing equity costs (Hogan, Lemon, and Libai 2003), customer prioritization strategies may not always be the best option. While the literature on customer prioritization strategy is mostly concerned with issues of
profitability, my research instead explores the behavioural side of customer prioritization strategies. Specifically, I explore how the existence of strong customer brand attachment as it relates to the necessity to maintain a certain level of brand-self distance limits a companies’ ongoing use of customer prioritization strategies.

This limitation in the use of customer prioritization strategies comes from the potential for this type of strategy to result in an increase to perceived brand-self distance among customers with strong brand attachment. This further leads to an increase in customers’ motivations to restore or increase brand-self distance by increasing their intentions for not only positive but also neutral and negative behaviours towards the brand. This argument is especially relevant when considering a customer prioritization strategy in the context of ongoing relationships.

Consider the following example: under a customer prioritization strategy, initially customers make a conscious choice to be in a low, middle or high customer priority group and assess this choice as the best option. However, there is also an ongoing, dynamic process of interpretation of this choice. For instance, Boulding et al. (1993) find that customers naturally update their expectations based on word of mouth, advertising, publicity and a change in the customer prioritization strategy itself. Once customers make their initial choice to be in one customer group, the company continues to provide new features and develop their customer prioritization strategy, requiring customers with strong brand attachment to reassess these additional company actions on the level of perceived brand-self distance.

Based on this reassessment, customers may experience an increase in their perceived brand-self distance and reassess the company’s new offerings. Suppose a customer chooses the cheapest plan among other available options. Then, during his/her usage of this plan imagine the customer sees a brochure with new plans, talks to someone and through word of mouth hears
about a better deal, reads a publicity story in a newspaper about various options available, or compares his/her treatment to other’s treatment. This new information about the initial choice made by the customer can lead him/her to reassess perceived brand-self distance. If this reassessment results in an increase in perceived brand-self distance, this may activate a mechanism of reassessing brand-self distance along with an increase in the customer’s desire to take some appropriate action towards the brand.

Thus, even though customers make an initial choice of a priority group, they can also reassess the differential offerings received while using the brand. This reassessment may also happen when customers develop strong attachment to a brand. This is because when the customer initially signed up to a priority group, he/she likely did not have a strong brand attachment or necessity to maintain perceived brand-self distance. However, with time this strong attachment may form, along with a necessity to maintain perceived brand-self distance. Consequently, new offerings under conditions of ongoing customer prioritization implementation will also be reassessed based on the customer’s perceived brand-self distance.

Customers may have a strong or weak brand attachment regardless of the priority group to which they belong. An example would be a frequent flyer (high priority customer) flying with the airline because his/her frequent flyer status provides special benefits, not because he/she is attached to the brand of the airline. At the same time a non-frequent flyer (low priority customer) may consistently choose the same airline because he/she feels an attachment with the brand, yet has no desire to fly frequently. In other words, there are customers from different priority groups that can have varying strengths of attachment to the brand. Therefore, when customers reassess an ongoing customer prioritization strategy, customers with strong brand attachment might perceive a threat to their relationship with the brand, regardless of their priority designation.
In this dissertation I focus on company actions as they relate to changes in customer offerings. Companies may vary and change these offerings over time as the relationship between the customer and the brand progresses. Customers with strong brand attachment may perceive such changes in company’s offerings as relevant to their perceived brand-self distance, which can result in a perceived threat to their relationship with the brand. I do not consider company actions as they relate to changes in brand image or corporate actions at a broader and more stable level. Although such actions are relevant to perceived changes to brand-self distance (e.g. changes in packaging, brand positioning, brand actions associated with corporate social responsibility), I focus on company actions as they relate to the immediate changes in customer offerings only to focus my research.

Companies typically implement customer prioritization strategies on an ongoing basis in pursuit of the economic benefit of saving time and money by concentrating on the customer groups with the most revenue. For example, it is common for companies to price the same product differently for some customer groups or make brands less available for some other customers. In these examples of the use of customer prioritization, one outcome is that they often lead to a process of social comparisons among the different customer groups.

The literature on social comparison suggests that being inferior to a comparative other is painful and induces negative effects as well as increased intention for negative behaviour (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Tesser, 1991; Carver, 2004; Higgins, 1987). As customer prioritization strategies vary offers to different customer groups, this sometimes creates situations of perceived inequities among customer groups. At the same time, customers form perceptions of their brand-self distance based on their own experience with the brand, regardless of whether they belong to the high or low priority group, and strive to maintain these perceptions of brand-
self distance on an ongoing basis. Thus, it would be expected that customer prioritization strategy implementation by the company can lead to a situation in which a customer judges a company’s treatment in light of his or her brand-self distance and feels the company falls short, perceiving an increase to his/her brand-self distance (feeling farther away from the brand).

4.2 Customer Prioritization Strategy as a Perceived Threat to the Relationship with the Brand

While customers with strong brand attachment may perceive an increase to brand-self distance when a customer prioritization strategy is implemented, the extent of these perceptions may differ from small to large perceived changes to brand-self distance. For example, a strongly attached customer of Apple may perceive an immediate small change to his/her brand-self distance if he/she is limited to a certain number of free downloads. At the same time, a strongly attached customer of Apple may perceive an immediate large change to his/her brand-self distance if he/she has to pay additional fees for downloads.

I expect that the larger the change the customers perceive to their brand-self distance as a result of company actions, the greater their perceived threat to their relationship with the brand. The literature (Dutton and Jackson, 1987; Jackson and Dutton, 1988) suggests that certain information may be perceived as more threatening to one’s social self (e.g., Brewer and Gardner 1996; Hogg 2003; Tajfel and Turner 1986), the part of the self-concept, which pertains to one’s relations with others (Brewer and Gardner 1996). Particularly, when customers with a strong brand attachment perceive an increase to their brand-self distance (feeling farther away from the brand), it threatens their social self, as they will likely feel that their relationship with the brand is not very strong and the brand thinks about such relationship as being inferior. For this reason, I
expect that as the size of perceived changes to brand-self distance increases, the perceived threat to the customer brand relationship also increases.

Note that when customers perceive an increase to their brand-self distance they may still feel that the brand is part of who they are and still identify with the brand. For example, when customers with a strong brand attachment perceive an increase to their brand-self distance, they may feel anxious that their relationship with the brand is not very strong, threatening the bond with the brand. This perceived change in brand distance may lead customers to feel that the brand does not value/view the relationship in the same light or with the same strength that they do, threatening the perceived brand relationship. At the same time, customers with a strong brand attachment may feel that the brand maintains self-relevance if these customers continue to strongly identify with the perceived brand changes.

In the context of my thesis, customers derive their perceptions of emotional security from their perceived changes to their perceived brand-self distance such that the larger such perceived brand-self distance becomes, the more anxious they may feel. Thus, the larger the change the customers perceive to brand-self distance, the more threatened they will feel.

The extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance will also play a role in determining the extent to which customers with strong brand attachment perceive a threat to their relationship with the brand. Recall, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance is the degree to which a customer with strong brand attachment identifies with the immediate perceived changes to the brand. A customer may feel that changes to the brand (e.g. new app introduction) are highly undesirable if the brand becomes less self-relevant (the brand changed too much). In this instance, the customer may feel that the brand interferes with his/her continuous goal pursuit and by extension now threatens his/her relationship with this brand.
Alternatively, a customer can also perceive changes to the brand (e.g. new app introduction) as highly desirable, keeping the brand highly self-relevant. In this instance, I expect that these desirable perceived brand changes will likely trigger a lower perceived threat to customer brand relationship. This is because the customer’s strong identification with the brand has remained relatively untouched and the situation does not interfere with their continuous goal pursuit. Therefore, the situation is less threatening to customer brand relationship.

When customers have low identification (low self-relevance) with the perceived brand changes, they no longer feel that the brand is part of who they are to the extent it was and also identify with the brand to a lesser extent. They also perceive the brand now begins to hinder their continuous goal pursuit, and start to feel that they no longer share the same values with the brand as they used to. Thus, when the brand doesn’t maintain self-relevance after a change, customers will feel a greater threat to their relationship with the brand.

Note that when customers perceive low identification with the brand changes, they may still feel close to the brand. This is in line with recent research (Sen, Johnson, Bhattacharya and Wang, 2015), suggesting that there are brands with which customers can simultaneously have a low perceived self-relevance (via brand identification) but also have a close perceived brand self-distance (via brand attachment). These researchers argue that this is possible because customers’ brand self-relevance is more closely associated with a social-identity goal pursuit whereas brand-self distance is more closely associated with an emotional security that the brand provides for the attached customer. Thus, for example, when customers with strong brand attachment have low identification with brand changes, they may feel that this hinders their goal pursuit, threatening the relationship with the brand. At the same time, they may still feel close to the brand as these brand changes may not be related to feelings of anxiety separation with the brand. I acknowledge
that it is also possible that perceived low identification may lead to feelings of anxiety and by extension a perceived increase in brand-self distance, and vice versa. In this thesis I look at the independent effects of perceived brand-self distance and the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance after a change (identification with brand changes).

In the context of my thesis, customers with strong brand attachment make inferences about their continuous goal pursuit based on the extent to which the brand maintain self-relevance: the less customers identify with the brand changes, the harder it is for them to pursue their identity-related goals and by extension, the more threatened they will feel.

In addition to the perceived changes to brand-self distance and self-relevance, a strongly attached customer will likely make attributions of blame for these perceived changes. This customer may either blame the company, himself/herself or other factors for his/her perceived changes to brand-self distance. Considering the literature on attribution of blame (e.g. Weiner, 1980; Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Folkes et al., 1987 and Folkes & Kotsos, 1986) in the context of a customer prioritization strategy, I suspect that when companies provide a clear standard by which customers can blame the brand vs. themselves or other factors for customer prioritization strategy implementation (from which they may derive changes to perceived brand-self distance), the customers are more likely to perceive a greater threat to their relationship with the brand. This would happen because if customers believe that the brand had an opportunity to not implement changes to customer prioritization strategy but made a decision to do so deliberately, customers will likely perceive the company’s actions as more intentional, resulting in a greater perceived threat to their relationship with the brand.

For instance, a customer may either think that he/she is unable to have access to a certain new feature for his/her cell phone (perceived change to brand-self distance) because the company
is too greedy (the customer blames the brand), because he/she didn’t pay enough money (the customer blames him/herself) or because of changes in legal regulations (the customer blames other factors). I expect that when a customer with a strong brand attachment blames the brand rather than him/herself or other factors for the perceived change to brand-self distance, he/she will feel a greater threat to his/her brand relationship.

In sum, different offerings tailored to different customer groups under a customer prioritization strategy could lead to perceived changes to brand-self distance among customers with strong brand attachment. The perceived changes to brand-self distance (small vs. large) along with the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance (high vs. low) and attribution of blame (self vs. company vs. other factors) will further affect the extent of perceived threat to customer brand relationship.

It is also important to understand what other consequences this perceived threat to the relationship with the brand might have. The literature suggests that customers might also experience damage to self-concept and feelings of distress as a consequence of these perceived threats (Cohen, 2004; Richman and Leary, 2009). Similarly, the literature on interpersonal attachment suggests that when an individual perceives a discrepancy in his/her current level of perceived distance with the attachment person/object, the individual feels anxious and becomes increasingly vigilant to attachment-related cues, seeking to reassess perceived distance with the attachment person/object (Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, 1998).

Given this, it is likely that customers who perceive a threat to the relationship with the brand will also experience distress and depending on the situation will likely feel a strong desire to restore or increase their brand-self distance. This leads to the next secondary question of this research: “What factors trigger changes in motivation to restore/increase brand-self distance?”
5. Determinants of Change in Motivation to Restore/Increase Brand-self Distance

5.1 Expectancy Theory of Motivation

According to the expectancy theory of motivation (Vroom, 1984), the increase in motivation to act is dependent on the extent to which one perceives the outcomes to be desirable and the extent to which one believes that his/her efforts to reach these outcomes will likely lead to the achievement of these desired outcomes. In the case of this thesis, the desirable outcomes are customers’ ability to continuously pursue goals associated with their attachment/desire to feel close to the brand. These are expected to be desirable outcomes as they allow customers to maintain their attachment to the brand and to avoid feelings of anxiety separation and distress.

When a brand maintains high self-relevance after a change, customers with a strong brand attachment also maintain a strong identity with the brand after changes, accelerating their continuous goal pursuit associated with their brand attachment. Since the outcome of this continuous goal pursuit is highly desirable, customers will likely increase their motivation to restore brand-self distance. However, when a brand results in lower self-relevance after a change, a customer with strong brand attachment may decrease their identity with the brand. This, in turn, will make it more difficult to pursue self-relevant goals, triggering a decrease in motivation to restore brand-self distance.

Another situation in which customers may decrease their motivation to restore brand-self distance is when they perceive a strong threat to their relationship with the brand. Recall that customers with a strong brand attachment experience the highest threat to their relationship with the brand when the brand maintains low self-relevance, there is a large brand-self distance and attribution of blame for the perceived changes to brand-self distance is directed toward the brand.
This combination of factors is most likely to lead to a situation in which customers no longer want to restore their brand-self distance due to the fact that the brand somehow “insulted” them personally and is now less self-relevant. In this situation, customers will no longer be able to use the brand to neither achieve self-relevant goals nor feel closeness to the brand to the same extent they could prior to the brand changes. Therefore, customers should be less motivated to restore their brand-self distance with the brand when they perceive high threat to their relationship with the brand, and vice versa.

Finally, another instance in which customers with strong brand attachment may feel that they are no longer able to pursue their goals to the same extent and/or feel close to the brand is when they believe that their effort to restore brand-self distance will not be sufficient in its restoration and, thus, the ability to pursue their goals associated with that attachment/feeling of closeness will be hindered. Again, these expectations are in line with previous research on motivation. According to the expectancy theory of motivation (Vroom, 1984), the increase in motivation to act is highly dependent on the extent to which one feels that his/her efforts will lead to the desired outcomes, in this case, their ability to continuously pursue goals associated with their brand attachment. Similarly, I expect that the extent to which a customer perceives he/she is likely to restore brand-self distance (i.e., perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance) will positively affect the extent of his/her motivation to restore it. A critical question at this point is how customers make inferences about the perceived likelihood of restoring brand-self distance.
5.2 Determinants of Perceived Likelihood to Restore Brand-self Distance

I believe that customers derive the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance from the extent of perceived change to brand-self distance, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and the extent of the perceived threat to the customer brand relationship. Particularly, the larger the change the customers perceive to their brand-self distance, the less likely they may feel that they can restore their brand-self distance. Similarly, I expect that the higher the perceived threat to the customer brand relationship, the lower the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance as larger perceived threats may be perceived as too difficult to overcome. I also expect that under conditions when the brand maintains high self-relevance, customers will likely perceive a higher likelihood to restore their brand-self distance due to their strong identification with this brand. This is in line with previous research, which demonstrated that under this condition customers perceive a higher likelihood that self-relevant outcomes will occur (Gregory, Cialdini and Carpenter, 1982). Thus, I similarly expect that when the brand maintains high self-relevance after a change, customers will perceive higher likelihood of restoring their brand-self distance.

In sum, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance, the perceived threat to customer brand relationship and the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance will all play a role in determining changes (increase/decrease) in motivation to restore brand-self distance. But why are these changes important? This brings me to the final secondary question of this thesis: “How does motivation to restore brand-self distance affect the types of behavioural intentions of customers with strong brand attachment?”
6. Triggered Motivation and its Implications

6.1 Changes in Motivation to Restore Brand-self Distance and Effects on Types of Customers’ Behavioral Intentions

The changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance are very important to examine as these changes are expected to trigger a corresponding increase in different types of behavioral intentions to restore/increase brand-self distance. In accordance with previous literature (Vroom, 1984), there is a positive relationship between motivation and the types of behavioral intentions to act upon this motivation. Thus, I also expect that the more one feels motivated to restore brand-self distance, the higher his/her behavioral intentions to restore it will be, and vice versa. The question then becomes, “How do customers restore or increase their brand-self distance?”

According to the literature on service failure (e.g. Singh 1988, 1990, Hirschman, 1970), when customers’ expectations are not met, they may increase their intentions to complain to the company (voice response), do nothing (remain loyal), exit the relationship (break up with the brand) and/or switch to a competing brand. Similarly, I expect that once customers’ expectations regarding their brand-self distance and the extent of brand’s self-relevance are not met, they may increase their intentions to engage in the above behaviors in order to restore or increase their brand-self distance.

When customers with strong brand attachment feel an increase in their motivation to restore brand-self distance they may want to do so by voicing their concerns and/or remaining indifferent (doing nothing about it). Alternatively, when customers with strong brand attachment feel a decrease in their motivation to restore brand-self distance, they may want to move further
away from the brand. Thus, switching to another brand or exiting the relationship would be more appropriate mechanisms for increasing brand-self distance.

The current literature on brand attachment (Park et. al, 2010) suggests that customers can maintain brand-self distance by engaging in positive behaviors towards the brand such as increasing repurchase behavior, willingness to pay a price premium, talking positively about the brand, and similar behaviors. It is believed that such behaviors assist in the maintenance of brand-self distance because it helps them to avoid feelings of separation anxiety with the brand. I also suggest that customers with a strong brand attachment will increase their behavioral intentions for positive behaviors towards the brand as one of the mechanisms of restoring brand-self distance. These types of behavioral intentions are believed to be positive for the brand because they are clearly profitable for the brand.

Together with these positive behavioral intentions, I believe that customers may also use negative behavioral actions such as demanding better treatment from the brand and/or talking negatively about the brand in order to restore their brand-self distance. For example, by voicing their concerns customers may engage in behaviors to defend their brand-self distance. They may feel that engagement in the defensive mechanism is in itself a step in restoring such brand-self distance. Further, by complaining to management, demanding to receive a better treatment, or complaining on the company’s website, customers may feel that their demands may be met to some extent, and that they will be able to partially restore their brand-self distance or at the very least defend such brand-self distance. Finally, by complaining to their friends and relatives, customers may be able to vent their feelings, warning others and at the same time defending their brand-self distance, even if this does not provide restoration entirely. I acknowledge that while the above behaviors typically hurt the brand, there are situations in which they might also benefit
the brand. For example, complaining to management may provide an opportunity for the brand to redeem itself. At the same time, these behaviors require additional resources for managing a damaged brand image, acquiring new customers and handling complaints. Therefore, the financial burden from these behavioral intentions seems to outweigh the benefits; I classify such behaviors as negative for the brand.

Higher intentions for neutral for the brand behavioral intentions are also expected. Such behavioral intentions as doing nothing or forgiving the brand’s mishaps have been previously reported as part of self-rationalizing mechanisms that customers may engage in order to protect the brand (Park et. al, 2010). While the above behaviors may be positive for the brand in the short term due to the desire of customers to protect the brand, this could also easily turn into a myriad of negative behaviors in the long term as there is likely a limit to customers’ forgiveness. Therefore, the financial burden from these behavioral intentions seems to approximately equal the benefits; I classify such behavioral intentions as neutral for the brand. In sum, I expect that when customers feel strong motivation to restore brand-self distance, they will increase their intentions to engage in a number of positive, negative and neutral (for the brand) behaviors, such as demanding and asking for better treatment from the brand, doing nothing, buying the brand again and/or complaining.

Further, I expect that when customers feel low motivation to restore brand-self distance they may want to terminate the relationship or switch to a competing brand. This is because when customers with a strong brand attachment are no longer motivated to restore brand-self distance, they will likely be motivated to increase their brand-self distance and, thus, heighten the intentions for distancing themselves from the brand. The extant literature on service failures (e.g. Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1996) suggests that this distancing type of behaviour typically
incorporates an increase in intentions to switch and exit the relationship with the brand. Further, Bendapudi and Berry (1997) also suggest that these types of behavioural intentions will be much more prevalent under conditions where there are few or low barriers to exiting the brand relationship.

To illustrate the above, take a brand such as Apple. For most, switching and ending a relationship is relatively easy and possible as there are not many barriers to exiting a brand relationship with Apple. However, if we consider a service brand such as the Queen’s School of Business, switching and ending a relationship may be much more difficult as students are locked into a four-year educational program that will provide them with a degree at the end. Therefore, in accordance with the above literature, I expect that customers with a strong brand attachment in a context of low barriers to exiting the relationship and low motivation to restore brand-self distance will be more willing to end the relationship and/or switch to a competing brand.

While the changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance are expected to drive the difference in the type of behavioural intentions among customers with strong brand attachment, attribution of blame for the perceived change to brand-self distance is also expected to drive the direction of these behavioral intentions.

6.2 Attribution of Blame for Perceived Changes to Brand-self Distance and Effects on Customers’ Behavioral Intentions

While the changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance are expected to drive the difference in the type of behavioural intentions among customers with strong brand attachment, attribution of blame for the perceived change to brand-self distance is also expected to drive the direction of these behavioral intentions. The literature on service failures supports the idea that
customers increase their behavioral intentions for such behaviors as complaining, demanding better treatment from the brand and complaining to management when they blame the brand for undesired outcomes (Richins, 1983; Curren and Folkes, 1987). The logic behind this is that customers direct their behavioural intentions towards the brand and want the brand to take action in resolving service failures because they believe the service failure occurred due to the brand’s deliberate actions. For instance, Folkes (1988) and Richins (1983) find that when a service failure is attributable to the service provider, customers are more likely to engage in complaint behavior and negative word-of-mouth.

Similarly, I expect that when customers with a strong brand attachment blame the brand for the perceived change to their brand-self distance, they will likely increase their intentions to engage in behaviours directed towards brand-resolution. This makes sense given that customers would want the brand to take responsibility and resolve the situation. Thus, these customers may increase their intentions to demand better treatment from the brand, complain to management and engage in other brand-resolving behaviours.

Recent research on attribution of blame to the self (Harris, Mohr and Bernhardt, 2006) finds that when customers blame themselves as opposed to the brand for service failures they are much less likely to approach the brand for resolution and much more likely to use more passive self-rationalizing mechanisms. Prior research (Folkes, 1988; Richins, 1983) also indicates that when a service failure is attributable to the customer, firms are not expected to provide remedy or restitution. I therefore expect that when customers with a strong brand attachment blame themselves for the perceived change to their brand-self distance and have a strong motivation to restore brand-self distance, they will likely increase their intentions to restore it through an increase in intentions for self-resolving behaviours. Among some of the self-resolving
behaviours customers can engage in order to restore brand-self distance are increasing intentions to buy more of a brand so as to feel closer, doing nothing and engaging in self-rationalizing.

Similarly to previous research on attribution of blame (Folkes, 1988), I expect that when customers with a strong brand attachment blame other factors for the perceived change to their brand-self distance and have a strong motivation to restore brand-self distance, they will likely increase their intentions to restore the relationship through increasing their engagement in a combination of self and brand resolving behaviours. For example, they may increase their intentions to buy more of a brand so as to feel closer to the brand, they may demand better treatment from the brand, they may do nothing and they may engage in self-rationalizing. This is because the attribution of blame onto other factors is more ambiguous, meaning that it is more difficult to hold a specific force accountable. In this case, engaging in behaviours to restore brand-self distance could incorporate shared self-brand responsibility and, by extension, behavioural intentions that incorporate both self and brand resolution.

In sum, the changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance and attribution of blame for the perceived change to brand-self distance are expected to drive the difference in the type of behavioural intentions among customers with strong brand attachment. It is very important to investigate such behavioural intentions, as they constitute limitations of strong customer brand attachments. This type of investigation also helps managers understand how customers with strong brand attachment may need to be treated in order to keep them satisfied.
7. Integrated Literature and Hypotheses

7.1 Overview

This section integrates the literature on brand attachment, customer prioritization strategy and perceived threats to brand relationships, outlining the main predictions of this thesis (Figure 1). These predictions address each the secondary research questions as they relate to the primary research question. The secondary research questions are:

- “What kinds of company actions may constitute perceived changes to brand-self distance?”
- “What factors trigger changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance?”
- “How does motivation to restore brand-self distance affect the resulting type of customers’ behavioural intentions?”

7.2 Perceived Threats to the Relationship with the Brand

Customers with a strong brand attachment strive to maintain perceived brand-self distance by continuously observing company actions, carefully monitoring information they consider relevant to the maintenance of their perceptions of brand-self distance. When company actions lead to a change in immediate perceived brand-self distance that indicates an increase in distance, customers are likely to also perceive a threat to their relationship with the brand. In the previous chapter, I argued that one context in which this could occur involves an ongoing customer prioritization strategy.

In this context, customers with a strong brand attachment could feel increased perceived brand-self distance as a result of different offerings to the various priority groups. That is, a
perceived threat would emerge if a customer perceives that their perceived brand-self distance is not maintained, but rather increased as a result of the offerings. Further, the larger the change the customers perceive to their brand-self distance as a result of company actions, the greater the perceived threat to their relationship with the brand. Recall, the literature (Dutton and Jackson, 1987; Jackson and Dutton, 1988) suggests that certain information maybe perceived as threatening to one’s social self (e.g., Brewer and Gardner 1996; Hogg 2003; Tajfel and Turner 1986), the part of the self-concept that pertains to one’s relations with others (Brewer and Gardner 1996). Particularly, when customers with a strong brand attachment perceive an increase in their brand-self distance, they will also likely feel that their relationship with the brand is not very strong. For this reason, I expect that as the perceived changes to brand-self distance increase, the perceived threat to the customer brand relationship will also increase:

**H1: There is a positive relationship between the perceived change to brand-self distance and the perceived threat to the relationship with the brand.**

While an increase in perceived brand-self distance is likely to result in a greater perceived threat to brand relationship, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and the attributions the customer makes about blame for the perceived change to brand-self distance will also play a role in determining the extent to which customers with strong brand attachment perceive a threat to their relationship with the brand.

Consider two situations in which a strongly attached customer of Apple is unable to receive a certain feature for his/her cell phone: In the first situation, the customer feels that the new feature is highly undesirable since it changes the brand so that the brand becomes less self-
relevant so the customer identifies with the brand to a lesser extent. In this situation, the customer feels that the brand changed drastically in a negative sense, leading to a perception of a large threat to his/her relationship with the brand. In the second situation, the customer may feel that the new feature is highly desirable, maintaining a high self-relevance for the brand (the customer highly identifies with the brand). In this second situation, I expect that the company actions will trigger a lower perceived threat to customer brand relationship. This is because the customer’s strong identification with the brand remains relatively untouched leading to a situation that is less threatening to the customer brand relationship.

Thus, I expect that:

**H2:** There is negative relationship between the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and the perceived threat to the customer brand relationship.

In addition to the perceived change to brand-self distance and the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance, I also consider the attributions a customer can make about blame for a change in brand-self distance. As previously discussed, the literature on attribution of blame (e.g. Weiner, 1980; Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Folkes et al., 1987 and Folkes & Kotsos, 1986) suggests that when customers blame the brand vs. themselves or other factors for the occurrence of negative events, it tends to exacerbate negative reactions. Similarly, if customers believe that the brand could have averted the customer prioritization strategy, the customers are likely to blame the brand for the customer prioritization strategy implementation. In contrast, if customers believe the implementation of a customer prioritization strategy was caused, for example, by harsh industry conditions, they are likely to blame other factors for the customer prioritization
strategy implementation. When companies provide a clear standard by which customers can blame the brand versus themselves or other factors for an ongoing customer prioritization strategy implementation, customers might experience a greater threat to their relationship with the brand because they might perceive a customer prioritization strategy as a more intentional threat directed towards them by the brand.

Consider two situations. In the first situation, the company can make a new feature available for all priority groups but only offers it to top priority customers as a reward for being valuable customers. In the second situation, the company tries to offer new features to all priority groups but fails due to circumstances beyond their control. The first situation likely represents a stronger threat to the relationship with the brand in comparison to the second situation, because in the first situation customers are likely to blame the brand for a customer prioritization strategy implementation and thus perceive a company’s actions as more intentional. Thus, I expect that when a customer with a strong brand attachment blames the brand rather than him/herself or other factors for perceived changes to brand-self distance, he/she will feel more of an intentional and personal threat from the brand, thus perceiving the situation more threatening to the brand relationship. Therefore, I expect:

\textit{H}_3a: \textit{There is a positive relationship between attribution of blame for perceived changes to brand-self distance onto the brand and perceived threat to customer brand relationship.}

\textit{H}_3b: \textit{There is a negative relationship between attribution of blame for perceived changes to brand-self distance onto the self/other factors and perceived threat to customer brand relationship}
In sum, different offerings tailored to different customer groups under a customer prioritization strategy could lead to changes to immediate perceived brand-self distance among customers with a strong brand attachment. These perceived changes might differ with respect to the extent of perceived change to brand-self distance (small vs. large), the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance (high vs. low) and the attribution of blame (self vs. brand vs. other factors). These differences will further affect the extent of the perceived threat to customer brand relationship and, in turn, play a role in determining the type of motivational mechanisms triggered as a reaction to perceived changes in company actions. This brings me to the second sub-question associated with the primary research question: “What factors trigger changes in motivation to restore/increase brand-self distance?”

7.3 Changes in Motivation to Restore/Increase Brand-self Distance

It is important to understand what consequences an emerging perceived threat to the brand relationship might have. The literature suggests that customers might experience damage to self-concept and feelings of distress as a consequence of these perceived threats (Cohen, 2004; Richman and Leary, 2009). Similarly, the literature on interpersonal attachment suggests that when an individual perceives a discrepancy to his/her perceived distance with the attachment person/object, the individual feels anxious and becomes increasingly vigilant to attachment-related cues, seeking to reassess such perceived distance (Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, 1998). Thus, it is likely that customers who perceive a threat to their brand relationship will also experience distress and engage in a reassessment of their brand-self distance. This reassessment will likely lead to a strong desire to either restore or increase brand-self distance.
I expect that the stronger the perceived threat to customer brand relationship, the lower the desire to restore their brand-self distance. Customers with strong brand attachment will experience the highest threat to their relationship with the brand when the brand changes result in lower self-relevance, when they perceive large brand-self distance and when they blame the brand for the perceived changes to brand-self distance. This combination of factors will likely lead to a situation in which customers no longer want to restore their brand-self distance due to the fact that the brand somehow insulted them personally and the brand stopped being self-relevant. These conditions will likely lead to a situation in which customers can no longer use the brand to achieve self-relevant goals. Therefore, I expect that customers would be less motivated to restore their brand-self distance when they perceive a threat to the brand relationship resulting from these conditions.

\[H_4: \text{There is a negative relationship between the perceived threat to customer brand relationship and the motivation to restore brand-self distance.}\]

According to the expectancy theory of motivation (Vroom, 1984), the increase in motivation to act is highly dependent on the extent to which one feels that his/her efforts will lead to the desired outcomes. Similarly, the extent to which a customer perceives that it is likely to restore brand-self distance (i.e., there is a high perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance) will affect the motivation to restore it. In other words, the extent to which a customer believes that he/she can restore his/her brand-self distance will positively affect the motivation to restore it. Thus:
**H5:** There is a positive relationship between the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance and the motivation to restore it.

But how do customers make inferences about the likelihood of restoring brand-self distance? I believe that customers will derive the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance from the size of the perceived change to brand-self distance, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and the perceived threat to the relationship with the brand. The larger the change the customers perceive to their brand-self distance the less likely they may feel that they can restore brand-self distance. Similarly, I expect that the higher the perceived threat to the relationship with the brand, the lower the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance because a large perceived threat may be seen as too difficult to overcome. In addition, I expect that when the brand maintains high self-relevance, customers will likely perceive a higher likelihood of restoring their brand-self distance due to their continued strong identification with the brand. Based on this, I expect that when the brand maintains a high self-relevance, customers will perceive a higher likelihood of restoring brand-self distance.

**H6a:** There is a negative relationship between the perceived change to brand-self distance and the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance.

**H6b:** There is a negative relationship between the perceived threat to customer brand relationship and the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance.
There is a positive relationship between the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance.

Further, the extent to which the brand is able to maintain self-relevance, the perceived threat to customer brand relationship and the perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance will play a role in determining an increase/decrease in motivation to restore brand-self distance. Specifically, when the brand maintains a high self-relevance, customers will want to maintain a relationship with the brand with which they have high identification, leading to an increase in their motivation to restore brand-self distance. Thus, I expect that:

There is a positive relationship between the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and the motivation to restore brand-self distance.

Finally, in accordance with the previous literature, when customers have a strong attachment to a brand, they tend to defend the brand and its associated mishaps (Park et al., 2010). Consequently, when customers have a strong attachment to a brand and perceive a sudden change to their brand-self distance, they will likely see this perceived change to their brand-self distance to be smaller than those individuals who are not as strongly attached to the brand:

There is a negative relationship between the strength of brand attachment and the extent of perceived changes to brand-self distance.
In sum, the above factors are responsible for changes in the motivation to restore brand-self distance. But why are these changes important? This brings me to the final secondary research question of this thesis: “How does motivation to restore brand-self distance affect the resulting types of customers’ behavioral intentions?”

7.4 Triggered Motivation, Attribution of Blame and its Implications on the Resulting Types of Behavioral Intentions

Different types of perceived changes in company actions under customer prioritization strategies such as the size of perceived brand-self distance, the degree to which the brand maintains self-relevance and the target of the attribution of blame will result in greater or lesser perceived threats to the brand relationship. These perceptions will then trigger an increase or decrease in motivation to restore brand-self distance. These changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance will then lead to corresponding changes in behavioral intentions to restore/increase their brand-self distance. In this process, it seems intuitive that the more a customer feels motivated to restore brand-self distance the higher will be his/her behavioral intentions to restore it. Thus, I expect:

\[ H_{9a}: \text{There is a positive relationship between motivation to restore brand-self distance and behavioural intentions to restore it.} \]

Similarly, the less a customer feels motivated to restore brand-self distance, the higher his/her behavioral intentions to increase brand-self distance, and the more likely he/she will
engage in distancing behaviors from the brand. Under such conditions, I generally expect higher intentions to either exit the relationship with the brand and/or to switch to a competing brand.

**H9**: There is a negative relationship between motivation to restore brand-self distance and behavioural intentions to end the relationship with the brand.

The question then becomes how do customers restore or increase their brand-self distance? I expect that when customers with a strong brand attachment blame the brand for the perceived change to their brand-self distance, they will likely increase their intentions to engage in behaviours directed towards leading the brand to address and resolve the situation. Thus, these customers are likely to engage more in activities related to demanding better treatment from the brand.

**H10a**: As a customer blames the brand for perceived changes to brand-self distance, the behavioural intentions for company resolution increase.

Further, I expect that when customers with a strong brand attachment blame themselves for the perceived change to their brand-self distance and have a strong motivation to restore it, they will likely increase their intentions to restore brand-self distance through activities in which they themselves attempt to resolve the situation. For example, these customers are likely to increase their intentions to buy more of a brand as to feel closer to the brand. They may also self-rationalize in order to restore their brand-self distance.
H10b: As a customer blames the self for perceived changes to brand-self distance, the behavioural intentions for self-resolution increase.

When customers with strong brand attachment blame other factors for the change to their brand-self distance and have a strong motivation to restore brand-self distance, they will likely increase their intentions to restore it through a combination of self and brand resolving behaviours. For example, they may increase their intentions to buy more of a brand, demand better treatment from the brand, do nothing and/or self-rationalize. This is because the attribution of blame onto other factors is more ambiguous and it’s harder to hold a specific force accountable, therefore engaging in behaviours to restore brand-self distance could incorporate shared self-brand responsibility and, by extension, behaviours that incorporate both self and brand resolution.

H10c: As a customer blames other factors for perceived changes to brand-self distance, the behavioural intentions for a combination of self and brand resolution increase.

Further, I expect that when customers blame the brand for perceived changes to brand-self distance and have a low motivation to restore it, customers may want to terminate the relationship or switch to a competing brand more often. This is because the customers will likely perceive such a situation as a deliberate brand action taken against them and may want to end the relationship by simply exiting or switching to a competing brand.
**H10a:** As a customer blames the brand for perceived changes to brand-self distance and has a low motivation to restore brand-self distance, he/she will increase his/her intentions to exit the relationship by switching to a competing brand or exiting the relationship.

Finally, there could be different brand contexts in which barriers to exiting the relationship with the brand are either high or low. On the one hand, with a product brand such as Apple, switching and ending a relationship is relatively easy and possible as there are not many barriers to exiting the relationship. On the other hand, with a service brand context such as a student at a university, switching and ending a relationship may be more difficult as students are locked into a four-year educational program that will provide a degree at the end of that period. Therefore, customers with a strong brand attachment with low barriers to exiting the relationship will be more willing to end the relationship and switch to a competing brand under conditions of low motivation to restore brand-self distance. Alternatively, customers with a strong brand attachment to a brand with high barriers to exiting the relationship will be less willing to end the relationship and switch to a competing brand under conditions of low motivation due to hardships associated with such a decision.

**H10c:** In the context of low vs. high barriers to exit the relationship with the brand and when motivation to restore brand-self distance is low, there will be higher behavioural intentions to exit the brand relationship.
In sum, the changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance and attribution of blame for the perceived change to brand-self distance are expected to drive the difference in behavioural intentions among customers with a strong brand attachment.

8. Integrated Framework.

In this section I provide a summary of the integrated literature review and a roadmap of the hypotheses discussed throughout the previous section. A visual representation of this summary appears in Figure 1.

To summarize the previous sections, Section 7.2 suggested that customers with a strong brand attachment could perceive a threat to their relationship with the brand under conditions of an ongoing customer prioritization strategy. I predicted that when customers with a strong brand attachment perceive large changes to their brand-self distance, blame the brand for the perceived changes to their brand-self distance and have low self-relevance with the brand as a result of changes to the brand, they are likely to perceive a higher level of threat to the relationship with the brand.

Section 7.3 focused on discussing changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance after customers experience a threat to the relationship with the brand. I argued that customers will likely have strong motivation to restore their brand-self distance when they continue to have high identification with the brand after changes to the brand (i.e., maintain high self-relevance with the brand), when they perceive a low threat to the relationship with the brand and when they perceive a high likelihood to restore brand-self distance.
Finally, Section 7.4 discussed how changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance affect resulting customers’ behavioural intentions. The expectation is that the more customers are motivated to restore their brand-self distance, the more likely they will intend to engage in a number of negative, neutral and/or positive behaviours towards the brand. At the same time, the less customers are motivated to restore their brand-self distance the more likely they will want to end the relationship or switch to a different brand. In addition, attribution of blame for the perceived changes to brand-self distance is expected to drive the direction of customers’ behavioral intentions.

Figure 1. Integrated Framework.
Chapter 3: Method

1. Overview

This thesis examines the potential limitations and negative outcomes of a strong customer brand attachment as it relates to the necessity to maintain perceived brand-self distance in ongoing company-customer relationships. Particularly, these limitations can occur when customers with a strong brand attachment perceive changes to their brand-self distance as a result of a company’s actions. Such perceived changes could increase or decrease motivation to restore one’s brand-self distance through an increase in one’s intentions to not only engage in positive behaviours (e.g. brand repurchase) towards the brand, but also to engage in neutral and negative behaviours towards the brand (e.g. do nothing, demand better treatment from the brand, exit the relationship, switch to a competing brand, etc.). Any increase in intentions to engage in negative behaviours towards the brand constitutes a limitation of a strong customer brand attachment on company’s actions.

To examine the primary research question, this thesis investigates three secondary questions: “What company actions may constitute perceived changes to brand-self distance?” “What factors trigger changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance?” and “How does motivation to restore brand-self distance affect the resulting types of customers’ behavioral intentions?” Testing the three secondary questions as they relate to the primary research question of this thesis requires three studies, testing ten proposed hypotheses.

The first question was examined using a combination of qualitative and experimental approaches and forms the basis for subsequent studies. To find out under what conditions company actions may lead customers to perceive changes to their brand-self distance, I began by
conducting interviews with participants through the use of an open-ended questionnaire (Study 1a). In analyzing this interview data, three situational themes in which participants felt immediate changes to their brand-self distance emerged. Based on these themes, I then developed (in Study 1a) and experimentally pre-tested (in Study 1b) scenarios of consumer situations, in which customers perceived immediate changes to their brand-self distance.

Building on this first study, the second study used the scenarios from the first study to test hypotheses $H_1$ through $H_{10}$ of this thesis (Figure1). These predictions relate to the remaining secondary questions raised in this dissertation. Particularly, Study 2 investigated how the strength of brand attachment affects perceived changes to brand-self distance ($H_8$). It also looked at how customers respond to perceived changes to their brand-self distance under conditions in which the brand maintains self-relevance (high vs. low) and across different attributions of blame: brand, self and other. This study focused on outcomes such as relationship between perceived threats to the relationship with the brand, perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance, motivation to restore brand-self distance and the resulting types of customers’ behavioral intentions (hypotheses $H_1$ through $H_7$ and $H_9$ through $H_{10}$).

This study was developed using brands from both service and product contexts, which helped to make its findings more generalizable. The experimental nature of Study 2 stemmed from the predictive nature of this thesis. Particularly, each secondary research question outlined in the dissertation seeks an understanding of causal affects among the variables of interest. The goal is to understand how a customer’s strong brand attachment can lead to negative behavioural intentions. Thus, an experimental design seems to be the best option for this study.

Building on the second study, Study 3 was used to address some limitations of Study 2 and also tested the proposed hypothesis (hypotheses $H_1$ through $H_7$ and $H_9$ through $H_{10}$) in a
different context. This study largely followed set up of Study 2.

2. Study 1a.

2.1 Purpose of Study 1a

The purpose of the first study (1a) was three-fold. First, it was designed to investigate the secondary research question: “What company actions may constitute perceived changes to brand-self distance?” Second, based on the understanding of different company actions under which customers may perceive changes to their brand-self distance, the goal was to develop manipulations for the three independent variables of the thesis: perceived change to brand-self distance, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance, and attribution of blame. Third, this study was also designed to understand the product and service brands to which the participants are strongly attached and most likely own/use. This was important as our main hypotheses are embedded in understanding customers who have a strong attachment to a brand and are currently engaged in an ongoing-relationship with that brand.

I conducted the first study as an open-ended interview using a retroactive-perspective approach, whereby respondents described a situation from their past and addressed their past feelings and reactions towards that situation. While there are some biases this approach may bring, there are also some benefits. It is an appropriate approach to use for a pre-test as it allows for identifying the service and product brands that are popular among participants and to which they may be strongly attached. This approach also allows for identifying the situations in which customers with strong brand attachment may feel distant from the brand; situations in which they blame the brand vs. themselves or other sources for the perceived changes to their brand-self distance; and situations under which the brand maintains high vs. low self-relevance despite
changes in perceived self-distance. This information from the study was further analyzed and used to identify both a product and a service brand that would be used in subsequent studies.

2.2 Participants

Study 1a was conducted with fourteen undergraduate Queen’s School of Business (QSB) students who voluntarily signed up for the study in response to a call on the School of Business research portal. The students were informed that they could participate in the study if they currently have a relationship with the brand to the extent that they strongly feel this brand represents them for who they are and portrays their identity. To prevent socially desirable responses, participants were explained the nature of their participation and told that all responses would remain confidential. As compensation for participating in the study, participants were allowed to add points to their marks in one of their courses.

2.3 Design

This study used a one on one qualitative interview technique, where participants answered series of questions in an open-ended format, where clarification questions were further asked (Appendix 1). The list of questions was used to guide the participants through the interview process and make sure that all topics necessary for my data collection were covered. These questions were also used to redirect the conversation if the participants were off track, talking about something unrelated or to not getting into the phenomenon in enough depth.
2.4 Procedure

The participants were scheduled for individual interviews in thirty minutes intervals in a classroom in the School of Business. Each one-on-one interview lasted between fifteen and thirty minutes and was conducted by the researcher. Once the participant arrived, he/she was informed of the study procedure including that his/her responses would be confidential. Then, he/she was given a consent form to sign. Following this, the researcher conducted the interview.

2.5 Analysis

The participants identified Apple as the most common brand to which participants felt strong attachment (ten out of fourteen participants mentioned Apple). Participants also identified other brands such as Tim Hortons (five out of fourteen participants mentioned this brand) and Air Canada (three out of fourteen participants mentioned this brand) and QSB (three out of fourteen participants mentioned this brand) as the most common service brands to which participants felt strong attachment and with which they have an ongoing relationship (Appendix 2). In addition to identifying brands, data from the interviews also identified three situational themes in which customers perceived an increase to their brand-self distance and felt that they needed to reconnect with the brand (Appendix 3):

First theme: “Sudden exclusion from the brand”

In this theme, the participants felt distant from the brand and wanted to reconnect with it when they found themselves initially included in the brand and then suddenly felt excluded. For example, this occurred for some when a company stopped supporting older products and changed new components, such as power supplies, that no longer worked with older models. In another instance, a participant was part of a fitness class when the class was suddenly cancelled. In other
situations, participants paid a discounted price for a service when all of a sudden they found out that they were automatically switched to paying a higher price without their authorization. In each case, an initial felt inclusion in the brand and later a sudden exclusion made participants perceive an increase to brand-self distance.

Second theme: “Social comparison to another customer”

Some participants experienced an increase to their brand-self distance in situations in which there was a social comparison to another customer. This happened, for example, when some customers were offered a certain treatment but other customers were not eligible for the treatment (e.g. PC Financial, Appendix 3).

Third theme: “An attached brand is badmouthed”

Finally, some participants perceived an increase to their brand-self distance when people close to them and respected, such as friends, badmouthed the attached brand (e.g. Dove, Appendix 3).

I used these results and these three themes to develop two scenarios using a product brand (Scenario 1 and 2, Appendix 4), and one scenario using a service brand (Scenario 3, Appendix 4) was developed and pre-tested (Study 1b) that could be used to manipulate an immediate change in brand-self distance. Apple was chosen as the product brand since participants felt a strong attachment to it more often than any other brand mentioned in Study 1a and there was also a high ownership of the brand. The Queen’s School of Business (QSB) brand was chosen for the service brand as all of the participants use this brand and I also expected that many students have a strong attachment to it although it did not come out in the elicitations of brands as often.

Scenario development

A number of scenarios were developed in order to manipulate three independent variables
of this thesis: perceived increase to brand-self distance (small vs. large), the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance (high vs. low) and attribution of blame (self vs. other vs. brand). I developed these manipulations to adhere to a number of criteria.

The main criteria for manipulating the size of perceived increase to brand-self distance (small vs. large) was that I needed to manipulate it in the context of an ongoing customer-brand relationship with a clear difference between the resulting small and large perceived brand-self distance. I also had to manipulate it in the context of company actions, something that the company did that could create a perceived change to brand-self distance and feelings of distance from the brand. Finally, even though I used company actions that induced feelings of distance from the brand, I needed to find a way to create scenarios that could lead to attributions of blame for this perceived changes to brand-self distance on either the brand, the customer themselves, or other factors. Given the above criteria and the three themes described above, I developed the scenarios described below.

Since the amount of perceived change to brand-self distance is the amount of perceived distance between the brand and customer’s self, it seems logical that one way to manipulate this would be through the decrease in a brand’s accessibility. This is in line with the first theme of “Sudden exclusion from the brand”. In other words the less access the customer perceives to a brand to which they are attached, the larger the perceived brand-self distance to that brand. For example, if a brand’s forum is accessible to the world but the customer find he/she can longer post to the forum, this should induce feelings of distance between the brand and the customer, although it will likely be related with a smaller perceived change to brand-self distance. On the other hand, if a customer is told when they login that the brand’s forum is no longer accessible to them and he/she is unable to read posts or post product reviews, this will likely be related to a
much larger perceived change to his/her brand-self distance. (Appendix 4, Scenario 1, brand-self distance manipulation). Based on this and using Apple as a product brand, the following is the manipulation of perceived change to brand-self distance based on the first theme emerging from Study 1a.

“Imagine that you have a strong relationship with Apple and this brand really represents you well as a person. You frequently go on Apple’s Facebook page and read and write reviews on various new Apple features and products. This morning you check reviews on a new Apple product that is coming out. {Insert manipulation of self-relevance}. You read about the new Apple product for a while and …” At this point, those participants in the condition of small perceived change to brand-self distance read: “… decide to comment. At this moment Apple informs you that you may have some limitations on the number of comments you may post on Apple’s Facebook page.” At the same time, those participants in the condition of large perceived change to brand-self distance read: “… decide to comment. At this moment Apple informs you that your privileges to comment on Apple’s Facebook page have been terminated. You are no longer able to comment, nor write and read reviews.”

Using similar thinking, and access to courses instead of access to a forum, I also created a manipulation for brand-self distance for the service brand, QSB. This manipulation of perceived change to brand-self distance for the service brand is (Appendix 4, Scenario 3, brand-self distance manipulation):

“Imagine that you are about to start your last semester at QSB. Thus far you really loved your experience here and feel that QSB is a big part of who you are as a person. You feel very honored and proud to attend QSB. As usual before the term starts, you go online to register and select your courses. When logged into the QSB portal you notice a new QSB course that is being
offered. {Insert manipulation of self-relevance}. This course seems to be the only course offered this semester that could work well for your graduation timeline. In addition, you met a friend of yours who has already registered for this course. Thus, you decide to give it a try and register.”

At this point, those participants in the condition of small perceived change to brand-self distance read: “You further find that while spaces are available, there are limitations on the number of students that can take this course.” Similar to the construction of the manipulation of large perceived change to brand-self distance, the manipulation for the service brand read: “You further pre-register for this course and receive an email a few days later, saying that you are no longer eligible to take this course.”

Another way to manipulate the perceived change to brand-self distance is through the use of a social comparison to another customer (customer group), which corresponds to the second theme found in Study 1a of “Social comparison to another customer”. It seems intuitive that two factors, time limitation and differential pricing among different customer groups, would likely be perceived by customers to affect their perceived changes to brand-self distance. For example, if a customer is eligible to download the full version of a new app for free only within the next 30 days while his/her friend is eligible to download the full version of this app for free with no time limitation, this would likely induce a small perceived change to his/her brand-self distance. At the same time, if the same customer is eligible to download a full version of a new app for a price of $4.99 while his/her friend was eligible to download it for free, the customer may feel a larger perceived change to his/her brand-self distance (Appendix 4, Scenario 2, brand-self distance manipulation). In this manipulation, the time limitation difference is used to create a smaller change to perceived brand-self distance than the monetary difference. Using this thinking, the
manipulation of perceived change to brand-self distance for a product brand (Apple) based on the second theme of Study 1a is:

“Imagine that you have a strong relationship with Apple and this brand really represents you well as a person. You frequently purchase Apple’s products and enjoy trying out new features and gadgets related to Apple. This morning you received an email from your friend regarding a new app available from the App Store and your friend has just downloaded the FULL VERSION for FREE. {Insert manipulation of self-relevance}.” At this point, those participants in the condition of small perceived change to brand-self distance read: “You click to download the new app at which point Apple informs you that you may download the full version for free for 30 days only.” At the same time, those participants in the condition of large perceived change to brand-self distance read: “You click to download the new app at which point Apple informs you that users such as YOU need to PAY $4.99 to download this app.”

Finally, a third manipulation of the perceived change to brand-self distance can be created based on the third theme emerging from Study 1a, “An attached brand is badmouthed”. For example, as the badmouthing of the brand by a friend becomes stronger, the customer’s perceived brand-self distance should increase. Further, the perceived change to brand-self distance should also be affected by whether the friend is talking about a rumour he/she heard vs. the expressing his/her strong opinion which undermines the brand. Talking about a rumour should induce a smaller perceived change to brand-self distance. Looking at other criteria listed above, however, note that using this third theme makes it difficult to create scenarios in which customers attribute the blame onto the brand/self. In addition, this theme does not directly relate to any company actions. As such, this theme does not match the criteria necessary for manipulations, and so I drop it from further analysis.
In this thesis I am also manipulating the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance. According to previous literature (Johnson et.al, 2011), a brand has low self-relevance when it does not say much about the customer, it is not unique or cutting edge, and/or it does not have personal meaning for the customer. At the same time, the brand is of high self-relevance when it makes the customer proud to be associated with it, it shows commitment to the customer (e.g., the company supports causes the customer believes in), and/or the brand expresses the customer’s values and “helps customers tell the world who he/she is and what he/she believes in” (Johnson et.al, 2011).

Given the need to manipulate self-relevance, the manipulation should include changes to core competencies of the brand to which the customer has developed an attachment. For example, if a customer is strongly attached to the Apple brand because it makes him/her feel unique, innovative and excited, then to maintain high self-relevancy the participants would be told that the brand is still all those things he/she believes in. At the same time in the low self-relevance condition the participants could be told that the brand is becoming too generic, too basic and not exciting, it no longer is all those things he/she believes in. In this thesis, all scenarios manipulate self-relevance similarly (Appendix 4, Scenarios 1, 2 and 3, Self-relevance Manipulation). Following is a discussion of these scenarios.

Participants in the high self-relevance condition for the product brand read: “You realize that Apple’s new product is very interesting and it goes well with your goals of being innovative. This product allows you to easily stay in touch with people you know and offers unique networking opportunities. You feel that such product shows Apple’s commitment to the “right” values in which you believe.” At the same time, participants in the low self-relevance condition for the product brand read: “You realize that Apple’s new product is very generic and it doesn’t
go well with your goals of being innovative. This product doesn’t easily allow you to stay in touch with people you know and doesn’t offer any networking opportunities. You do not feel that such product shows Apple’s commitment to the “right” values in which you believe.”

For the final manipulated variable, attribution of blame, it was manipulated by letting participants know who may be likely at fault for changes in their perceived brand-self distance. This attribution of blame needed to be clearly set up pointing attribution to either the brand, the customer or to other factors. Continuing with the Apple example, below is an example of the manipulation of attribution of blame in one of the scenarios (Appendix 4, Scenarios 1 and 2, Attribution of Blame Manipulation).

Participants in the blame the brand condition read: “Apple further explains that the company is limiting its Facebook accessibility in order to reward only its most valuable customers.” Participants in the blame themselves condition read: “Apple further explains that the company is providing accessibility only to those who agreed with the terms and conditions of its Facebook page. You forgot to agree with these, and you are now too late.” Finally, participants in the blame other factors condition read: “Apple further explains that the company is limiting its Facebook accessibility as a result of a new local legislation.”

For the service brand (QSB), in one of the scenarios the manipulation of attribution of blame was constructed similarly. Participants in the blame the brand condition read: “You find out that QSB limits the amount of students eligible to sign up for this course on the basis of priority to their most valuable students.” Participants in the blame themselves condition read: “You suddenly remember that QSB sent you a series of reminders to register in the courses before a certain date. However, you forgot to act on this and are now too late.” While participants in the blame other factors condition read: “You find out that the amount of student's eligible to
sign up for this course was limited due to a newly implemented federal government requirement to reduce classroom size.”

2.6 Discussion

Study 1a identified three situational themes under which strongly attached customers perceived an immediate increase to their brand-self distance. These three situational themes were “sudden exclusion from the brand”, “social comparison to another customer” and “brand is badmouthed”. In developing the brand-self distance manipulation, I focused on the first two themes for several reasons but also because they are of most importance to managers as these are two themes that come from things that are within their control and could be avoided if necessary.

Second, based on results from Study 1a including the above themes, scenarios for manipulating the independent variables of this thesis were developed in both a product (Apple) and a service (QSB) brand context. The manipulations were for the size of perceived change to brand-self distance, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and attribution of blame (Appendix 4, Scenarios 1, 2 and 3).

3. Study 1b.

3.1 Purpose of Study 1b

The goal of Study 1b was twofold. First, this study continued to explore the first research question: “What company actions may constitute perceived changes to brand-self distance?” It did so by taking the situations identified in Study 1a and testing them experimentally. This approach provides additional support for the type of company actions that customers with strong
brand attachment perceive as resulting in changes to their brand-self distance. Second, Study 1b was designed to pre-test the manipulations as well as to assess the reliabilities of measures. This is important as these measures and manipulations form the basis of subsequent studies. Study 1b also seeks to provide preliminary support for hypotheses $H_1$ and $H_4$ of this thesis by demonstrating that customers with a strong brand attachment do perceive changes to their brand-self distance as a result of brand initiated activities. Further, it examines the relationship between perceived threat to brand-self distance and the motivation to restore brand-self distance among customers with strong brand attachment.

3.2 Participants

Seventy-two School of Business undergraduate students who voluntarily signed up for the study responding to a call on the research portal participated in this study. In recruiting the students, they were told that they could participate in the study if they currently have a relationship with Apple and QSB such that they feel strongly that this brand represents them for who they are and portrays their identity. Like Study 1a, this group of participants was allowed to add points to their marks in one of their courses as compensation for participating in the study.

3.3 Design

Study 1b consisted of a 2 x 3 x 2 experimental design with two levels of perceived change to brand-self distance (small, large), three levels of attribution of blame (self, other factors, brand) and two levels of the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance (high, low) embedded in the scenarios discussed above.

The questionnaire included the following measures of dependent variables: perceived
threat to the relationship with the brand, perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance, motivation to restore brand-self distance, and behavioural intentions. The measures of manipulation checks for independent variables included: perceived brand-self distance, self-relevance and attribution of blame. The control measure: the strength of brand attachment.

3.4 Procedure

The participants first answered questions that measured their strength of brand attachment to Apple and QSB. The participants then were advised that they would be reading a number of scenarios and to treat each scenario independently when answering questions with regards to each scenario. They were further randomly assigned into two conditions. In the first condition, respondents read and rated scenarios in the following order: scenarios 2 and 3 (Appendix 4). In the second condition, respondents read and rated scenarios in the following order: Scenarios 1 and 3 (Appendix 4). The participants then answered a questionnaire measuring the dependent variables of this study and manipulation checks (Appendix 5).

**Measures:**

Before the manipulations, participants were asked to answer questions that measured their strength of brand attachment to Apple and QSB by answering: “to what extent do you feel that you are personally connected to Brand X”, “to what extent is Brand X part of you and who you are”, “to what extent are your thoughts and feelings towards Brand X often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own” and “to what extent do your thoughts and feelings towards Brand X come to you naturally and instantly” (Park et. al, 2010) (α=0.86).

Immediately after the manipulation, perceived brand-self distance was captured by using an adjusted measure of the Park et.al (2013) scale of the construct (Appendix 5) whereby
participants were asked “with respect to how close the brand X is to me” (anchored 1= the brand X is moving away from me; 11= the brand X is remaining very close to me) and “how personally disconnected do you feel from the Apple brand” (anchored 1= I am beginning to feel personally disconnected from the brand X; 11= I remain strongly connected to the brand X) (α=0.79). These adjustments were necessary in order to capture the immediate rather than the more stable perceived change to brand-self distance.

The extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance was measured using an existing measure of identification reflecting the degree to which consumers define themselves with the same attributes and descriptions they believe define a brand (Einwiller et al. 2006; Smith, Morgan, and White 2005) (α=0.96) (Appendix 5). Attribution of blame was measured by asking participants whether they believed the brand, they themselves or other factors were responsible for their perceived changes to their brand-self distance as well as by asking participants to identify the extent to which they believed each of the factors was to blame (Grégoire and Fisher, 2006).

The participants then answered questions with regards to the dependent variables of this thesis. I first measured the perceived threat to the relationship with the brand by asking participants whether they believed “this situation made me feel like Brand X disliked me and the relationship I have with Brand X” and “this situation made me feel like Brand X thought about my relationship with Brand X as being inferior” (Aquino and Douglas, 2003) (α=0.92).

I then measured the perceived likelihood of restoring brand-self distance by asking participants to indicate the extent to which “the situation makes me feel that I can remain very close to the brand X”, “the situation makes me feel that I can remain strongly connected to the brand X”, “the situation makes me feel that I can retain my previous relationship with the brand
X”, “the situation makes me feel that I can feel closer to the brand X” \(\alpha=0.93\) and motivation to restore brand-self distance by asking participants to indicate the extent to which “the situation makes me feel that I want to remain very close to the brand X”, “the situation makes me feel that I want to remain strongly connected to the brand X”, “the situation makes me feel that I want to retain my previous relationship with the brand X”, “the situation makes me feel that I want to feel closer to the brand X” (Park et. al, 2013) \(\alpha=0.91\).

I further asked participants to list as many possible behaviours they may engage in as a response to consumer situations described in the corresponding scenario. Finally, I asked them to code their behaviours from the thought listings into as many categories that may apply by using twelve categories used in previous research: “I will terminate the relationship with brand X” “I will pay more to get a better deal” “I will complain to management” “I will complain to friends and family” “I will complain on the website” “I will promote the brand to others” “I will talk positively about the brand to others” “I will buy the brand again” “I will do nothing” “I will demand better treatment from the company” “I will switch to an alternative brand” “Other, please specify:_______”. For more details on measures see Appendix 5.

Finally, participants answered manipulation check questions by responding to the information they read in the scenario. For instance, in Scenario 1, participants needed to choose whether they read that “the new Apple product is very unique” or “the new Apple product is very generic”, such a procedure provides an opportunity for a researcher to make sure that participants read the scenario and answered questions with the corresponding scenario in mind. Similar questions were asked for the other manipulated variables.
3.5. Analysis

Analysis of Scenario 1

Manipulation checks: The majority of participants correctly recalled the conditions they were assigned to. In a small brand-self distance condition, 94.7% of participants correctly remembered reading: “you may have some limitations on the number of comments you may post on Apple’s Facebook page” while 93.8 % correctly recalled information in the large brand-self distance condition: “your privileges to comment on Apple’s Facebook page have been terminated. You are no longer able to comment, nor write and read reviews” ($\chi^2(1) = 27.4, p < .001$). In the high vs. low self-relevance conditions, participants correctly identified the scenario they read: “Apple’s new product is very unique” vs. “Apple’s new product is very generic”, 72% vs. 87% ($\chi^2(1) = 23.6, p < .001$). Additionally, in the brand vs. self vs. other attribution of blame conditions participants were asked to choose who was likely at fault among brand, myself and other factors. Those in the brand vs. self vs. other attribution of blame conditions correctly blamed the brand 94% vs. self 80% vs. other factors 80% ($\chi^2(4) = 30.1, p < .001$).

Participants reported significant difference between the size of brand-self distance consistent with their assigned condition in Scenario1 (Small vs. large brand-self difference: Means 5.71 vs. 3.84, F(1,32)= 7.49 , p =0.011). This suggests the manipulation worked, experimentally validating the findings from Study 1a that when customers are in a situation of “sudden exclusion from the brand” they begin to perceive an immediate increase to their brand-self distance. Participants also perceived significant differences on the perceived self identification measure as a result of the self relevance manipulations (Low vs. high self-relevance: Means 3.1 vs. 3.9, F(1,32)=9.5, p=0.06) in Scenario 1, suggesting this manipulation worked as it should.
Main Analysis:

ANOVA analysis on perceived threat to the relationship with the brand showed significant effects of the experimental manipulation of brand-self distance ($F(1,32) = 7.3, p = .011$). Consistent with expectations, participants perceived higher perceived threat to the relationship with the brand in the large vs. small brand-self distance conditions (Means 5.64 vs. 4.6). These results supported the general idea that when customers perceive increases in immediate brand-self distance the higher perceived threat to the relationship they feel. This supported $H_1$. Further, linear regression analysis of perceived threat to the relationship with the brand on motivation to restore brand-self distance was performed. The regression equation was significant ($F (1,30)=14.4, p=0.001$), with an $R^2$ of .36. This supported the predicted relationship in $H_4$, namely as perceived threat increased, the motivation to restore brand-self distance decreased.

Analysis of Scenario 2

Manipulation checks: The majority of participants correctly recalled the scenario they read. In a small brand-self distance condition, 95% of participants correctly identified consumer situation from the scenario: “I may download the full version for free for 30 days only” while 100 % in the large brand-self distance condition remembered reading: “I need to pay $4.99 to download the new app” ($\chi^2(1) = 33.2, p < .001$). Further, in the high vs. low self-relevancy conditions, participants correctly identified the situations from the scenario “Apple's new app is very unique” vs. “Apple's new app is very generic”, 70.8% vs. 84.6% ($\chi^2(1) = 10.38, p = .001$). Additionally, in the brand vs. self vs. other attribution of blame conditions participants were asked to choose who was likely at fault among brand, myself and other factors. In the brand vs.
self vs. other attribution of blame conditions participants correctly blamed the brand 81% vs. self 86% vs. other factors 62% (χ²(4) = 17.1, p < .001).

Participants reported a significant difference between the size of brand-self distance consistent with their assigned condition in Scenario 2 (Small vs. large brand-self difference: Means 7.78 vs. 4.82, F(1,28)=0.18, p =0.003). This suggests the manipulation worked, experimentally validating the findings from Study 1a that when customers are in a situation of “social comparison to another customer” they begin to perceive immediate change to their brand-self distance.

In Scenario 2, however, participants did not perceive a significant difference between the self relevance (low vs. high) manipulated and the perceived self identification measured (Means 4.1 vs. 4.2, F(1,28)=0.236 , p =.83). This manipulation was not successful in the context of this scenario.

**Main Analysis:**

ANOVA analysis on perceived threat to the relationship with the brand showed significant effects of the experimental manipulation of brand-self distance (F(1,28)=4.4, p=.045). Consistent with expectations, an independent sample t-test showed that participants perceived higher perceived threat to the relationship with the brand in the large vs. small brand-self distance conditions (Means 4.26 vs. 3.26). These results supported the general idea that customers perceive increases in immediate brand-self distance the higher perceived threat to the relationship they feel. This supported H1. Further, linear regression analysis of perceived threat to the relationship with the brand on motivation to restore brand-self distance was performed. The regression equation was significant (F (1,26)=7.07, p=0.013), with an R² of .214. This supported
the predicted relationship in $H_4$, namely as perceived threat increased, the motivation to restore brand-self distance decreased.

**Analysis of Scenario 3:**

**Manipulation checks:** The majority of participants correctly identified scenarios they read. In a small brand-self distance condition, 87% of participants correctly remembered an excerpt from the scenario: “there are limitations on the number of students that can take the new course” while 63% in the large brand-self distance condition remembered reading: “you were pre-registered for the new course but received an email stating you are no longer able to take this course”, ($\chi^2(1) = 4.8$, $p = .028$). Further, in the high vs. low self-relevancy conditions, participants correctly recalled the information they read in the scenario: “the new QSB course is very unique” vs. “the new QSB course is very generic”, 67% vs. 65% ($\chi^2(1) =3.45$, $p = .06$). Additionally, in the brand vs. self vs. other attribution of blame conditions participants were asked to choose who was likely at fault among brand, myself and other factors. In the brand vs. self vs. other attribution of blame conditions participants correctly blamed the brand 90% vs. self 97% vs. other factors 83% ($\chi^2(1) = 26.5$, $p < .001$).

Participants reported a significant difference between the size of brand-self distance consistent with their assigned condition in Scenario 3 (Small vs. large brand-self difference: Means 7.84 vs. 6.05, $F(1,29)=5.04$, $p =0.022$). This suggests the manipulation worked, experimentally validating the findings from Study 1a that when customers are in a situation of “sudden exclusion from the brand” they begin to perceive immediate change to their brand-self distance.
Participants perceived marginally significant difference between the self relevance (low vs. high) manipulated and the perceived self identification measured (Means 4.3 vs. 4.87, F(1,29)=2.01, p =0.11) in Scenario QSB, this manipulation was marginally significant.

Main Analysis:

ANOVA analysis on perceived threat to the relationship with the brand showed significant effects of the experimental manipulation of brand-self distance (F(1,27)=10.52, p=.003). Consistent with expectations, an independent sample t-test showed that participants perceived higher perceived threat to the relationship with the brand in the large vs. small brand-self distance conditions (Means 4.68 vs. 3.23). These results supported the general idea that customers perceive increases in immediate brand-self distance the higher perceived threat to the relationship they feel. This supported $H_1$. Further, linear regression analysis of perceived threat to the relationship with the brand on motivation to restore brand-self distance was performed. The regression equation was significant (F (1,27)=13.65, p=0.001), with an $R^2$ of .34. This supported the predicted relationship in $H_4$, namely as perceived threat increased, the motivation to restore brand-self distance decreased.

3.6 Discussion

Study 1b continued to explore the question: “What company actions may constitute perceived changes to brand-self distance?” by taking the situations identified in Study 1a and testing them experimentally. Both themes of “sudden exclusion from the brand” and “social comparison to another customer” were supported as situations in which customers with strong brand attachment perceived an increase in their brand-self distance as a result of company actions. Further, Study 2b pre-tested the manipulations and reliability of measures. Particularly,
Scenarios 1 (in product context) and 3 (in service context) worked best for manipulating independent variables; thus, they were selected for Study 2. Study 1b also provided a preliminary support for hypothesis $H_1$ and $H_4$ of this thesis by demonstrating that when customers with strong brand attachment perceive an increase to their brand-self distance, they may feel a threat to their relationship with the brand. Further, as the perceived threat to the relationship with the brand increases, motivation to restore brand-self distance decreases among customers with strong brand attachment.

4. Study 2

4.1 Purpose of Study 2

The purpose of the second study is to examine the remaining two research questions of this thesis: “What factors trigger changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance?” and “How does motivation to restore brand-self distance affect behavioural intentions of customers with strong brand attachment?” Study 2 is designed to understand resulting differences in reactions between customers with strong and weak brand attachment as well as to investigate, in more depth, the reactions among customers with a strong brand attachment.

4.2 Participants

Three hundred and twenty eight School of Business undergraduate students who voluntarily signed up for the study responding to a call on the research portal participated in this study. In recruiting the students, they were told that they could participate in the study if they currently have a relationship with Apple and QSB brands. Like in the previous studies, this group
of participants was allowed to add points to their marks in one of their courses as compensation for participating in the study.

4.3 Design

Study 2 consisted of a 2 x 2 x 3 x 2 experimental design with two levels of perceived change to brand-self distance (small vs. large), two levels of the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance (high vs. low) and three levels of blame attribution (blame vs. self vs. other). These variables were manipulated in two separate brand conditions, a product brand (Apple) and a service brand (QSB). The strength of customer-brand attachment was measured in each of the brand conditions and served as a measured independent variable. The dependent variables were the same as in Study 1b and were measured the same way (Appendix 5).

4.4 Participant Selection and Sample Size

In recruiting participants, they were told that they could participate in the study if they currently have a relationship with Apple and QSB brands such that these brands strongly represent them as a person. Therefore, the three hundred and twenty eight participants who signed up for the study already had a strong brand attachment with the above brands. To verify this, I measured the strength of brand attachment to Apple (M=7.13; SD=2.45; on an eleven point scale) and QSB (M=8.34; SD=2.03; on an eleven point scale) before participants participated in the study. Since the participants’ strength of brand attachment was skewed towards strong brand attachment, I decided to use a mean split of this variable based on the 11-point scale. Those who had a cumulative score of 5 or below were excluded from the study due to low strength of brand
attachment, leaving two hundred forty six and two hundred eighty nine participants in product brand and service brand context respectively.

4.5 Procedure

The participants first agreed to terms and conditions of this study. Next, the participant’s strength of brand attachment to the brand was measured using Park’s et.al (2010) measure (Appendix 5). Reliabilities for these scales were good (product brand condition \( \alpha=0.76 \), service brand condition \( \alpha=0.84 \)). The participants were then advised that they will be reading two scenarios and that they should treat each scenario independently when answering questions. The respondents read and rated scenarios in the following order: Scenarios 1 and 3 (Appendix 4), which I further call: Scenarios Apple and QSB respectfully. They were then randomly assigned to experimental conditions and presented with the manipulations discussed earlier (Appendix 4). After seeing the manipulations, manipulation checks and dependent variables of this thesis were measured: perceived threat to the relationship with the brand, perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance, and motivation to restore brand-self distance. Reliabilities were high for all these measures: perceived threat to the relationship with the brand (product brand condition \( \alpha=0.90 \), service brand condition \( \alpha=0.93 \)), perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance (product brand condition \( \alpha=0.92 \), service brand condition \( \alpha=0.93 \)), motivation to restore brand-self distance (product brand condition \( \alpha=0.90 \), service brand condition \( \alpha=0.91 \)). All three measures were taken from previous research (Appendix 5).

Further, the same as in Study 1b, participants were asked to describe their likely course of action if they were in the situation described in the scenario. They did so in an open-ended form, by listing their likely reactions. They further coded their answers into the most likely categories.
of reactions and could choose as many categories as they wanted: “I will terminate the relationship with brand X” “I will pay more to get a better deal” “I will complain to management” “I will complain to friends and family” “I will complain on the website” “I will promote the brand to others” “I will talk positively about the brand to others” “I will buy the brand again” “I will do nothing” “I will demand better treatment from the company” “I will switch to an alternative brand” “Other, please specify:_______” (Appendix 5).

In addition to this, the last section of the questionnaire included manipulation check measures for perceived change to brand-self distance, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and attribution of blame. Again there were high reliabilities for these measures: Perceived change to brand-self distance (product brand condition $\alpha=0.85$, service brand condition $\alpha=0.85$), the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance (product brand condition $\alpha=0.95$, service brand condition $\alpha=0.96$) (Appendix 5).

*Manipulation checks:*

*Product Brand Condition*

The majority of participants correctly recalled scenarios they read. In the small brand-self distance condition, 87 % of participants correctly identified consumer situation from the scenario: “you may have some limitations on the number of comments you may post on Apple’s Facebook page”, while 95 % in the large brand-self distance condition correctly recalled: “your privileges to comment on Apple’s Facebook page have been terminated. You are no longer able to comment, nor write and read reviews”, ($\chi^2(1) = 219.8$, $p < .001$). There were significant difference between the cells of manipulated brand-self distance (small vs. large) on the measure of perceived change to brand-self distance (Means: 5.64 vs. 4.76, $t(242)=2.21$, $p < 0.05$). Specifically, customers in the small vs. large brand-self distance condition perceived that the
brand remains close and they remain connected to that brand. These results suggest the manipulation worked.

In the low vs. high self-relevance condition, 92.5% of participants vs. 90.2% correctly remembered the scenario they read: “Apple’s new product is very generic” vs. “Apple’s new product is very unique” ($\chi^2(1) = 221.8$, $p < .001$). Participants perceived significant difference on the measure of perceived self identification between the cells of manipulated self relevance (low vs. high) (Means: 3.18 vs. 4.05, $t(242)=-5.68$, $p =0.00$). Specifically, those in the low vs. high self-relevance condition identified with the brand less. Again, this is evidence that the manipulation worked.

Additionally, in the brand vs. self vs. other attribution of blame conditions participants were asked to choose who was likely at fault among brand, myself and other factors. In the brand vs. self vs. other attribution of blame conditions participants correctly blamed the brand 81% vs. self 18.5% vs. other factors 35% ($\chi^2(4) = 32.5$, $p < .001$). The manipulation for attribution of blame to the brand worked well, the manipulation for blaming the self and other factors worked poorly. This is a limitation of Study 2, which I address in Study 3. Nevertheless, I created a new variable for attribution of blame that consisted only out of those observations that passed manipulation checks and used this variable for hypothesis testing. Although this is not ideal, as there are few observations, it still allows for some preliminary hypothesis testing of this thesis.

*Service Brand Condition*

The majority of participants were able to recall the scenario they read. In a small brand-self distance condition, 76.76 % of participants correctly identified consumer situation from the scenario: “there are limitations on the number of students that can take the new course”, while 91.87 % in the large brand-self distance condition recalled reading: “you were pre-registered for
the new course but received an email stating you are no longer able to take this course”, \( \chi^2(1) = 142.98, p < .001 \). Participants perceived significant difference between the cells of the manipulated brand-self distance (small vs. large) on the measure of perceived change to brand-self distance (Means: 7.00 vs. 5.89, \( t(286)=3.49, p =0.001 \)). Specifically, customers in the small vs. large brand-self distance condition perceived that the brand remains close and they remain connected to that brand. The manipulation was successful.

In the low vs. high self-relevance condition, 96.68% of participants vs. 91.8% correctly remembered reading: “the new QSB course is very generic” vs. “the new QSB course is very unique”, \( \chi^2(1) = 250.27, p < .001 \). There were significant differences between the cells of manipulated self relevance (low vs. high) on the measure of perceived self-identification (Means: 4.19 vs. 4.66, \( t(287)=-2.8, p =0.005 \)). Specifically, those in the low vs. high self-relevance condition identified with the brand less. This indicated that the manipulation worked.

Additionally, in the brand vs. self vs. other attribution of blame conditions participants were asked to choose who was likely at fault among brand, myself and other factors. In the brand vs. self vs. other attribution of blame conditions participants correctly blamed the brand 67.59% vs. self 76.78% vs. other factors 80.4% (\( \chi^2(4) = 256.31, p < .001 \)). This indicated that the manipulation worked.

4.6 Analysis

To get an initial understanding of differences between customers with strong and weak brand attachment, I created two groups in each product brand condition based on a median split of brand attachment responses in each condition. I conducted an ANOVA with the strength of brand attachment predicting perceived brand-self distance in the two conditions: Apple and QSB
(Fs(1,323) = 13.07 and 3.33, ps < .001 and =0.06 for Apple and QSB conditions respectfully). This supported the expectation that customers with a strong brand attachment perceive relatively smaller immediate changes to brand-self distance in comparison to those with a weak brand attachment (Ms = 5.15 vs. 4.01 and 6.45 vs. 5.3, for Apple and QSB condition respectfully). This provides support for $H_8$ in that there is a negative relationship between the strength of brand attachment and perceived changes to brand-self distance.

I ran a confirmatory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS that included all five latent constructs for the overall model (Figure 1). In this model, all items were restricted to loading on their predetermined factors and all factors were allowed to correlate with one another. To evaluate both convergent and discriminant validity, I examined the measurement properties of the constructs. The model estimates suggest that the measurement model has adequate convergent and discriminant validity. With regards to the former, all factor loadings were significant (all p’s < .001) and the average variance extracted by each construct was greater than 0.5 (brand self distance (0.63), the extent to which brand maintains self-relevance (0.62), perceived threat (0.52), perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance (0.82) and motivation to restore brand-self distance (0.51). These results suggest that the measures reflect adequate convergent validity.

Further supporting this, construct reliabilities suggest internal consistency in the items used to capture each measure (reliabilities of product brand, service brand and combined brand conditions; perceived threat: $\alpha$s = .92, .90 and .93, perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance: $\alpha$s = .90, .92 and .93, motivation to restore brand-self distance: $\alpha$s = .93, .90 and .91, the extent to which the brand keeps self relevant: $\alpha$s = 0.84, .95 and .96 and perceived brand-self distance: $\alpha$s = .86, .85 and .86). For the overall model, the average variance extracted by each
construct exceeds their corresponding squared inter-construct correlation estimates. Given this, the measurement model appears to have adequate discriminant validity given that the items are much more closely associated with the construct that they are intended to capture than with other constructs in the model. Taken as a whole, this assessment suggests that the measurement model is acceptable.

Having established the acceptability of the measurement model, I then estimated three structural models (Figure 2a-c). I first ran an overall model (Figure 2a), using combined data from both product and service brand conditions. I then ran the same model separately in the product brand (Figure 2b) and the service brand (Figure 2c) conditions. All three models simultaneously test the proposed paths as shown in Figures 2a through 2c.

The fit indices suggest an acceptable model fit for each of the three models. Although the chi-square goodness of fit test is significant (combined: $\chi^2(66) = 117.78, p < .001$; product brand: $\chi^2(66) = 94.13, p < .05$; service brand: $\chi^2(66) = 94.71, p < .05$), other fit indices consistently suggest an acceptable model fit: comparative fit indexes (CFI) = .99 for all three models, incremental fit indexes (IFI) = .99 for all three models and the root square mean error of approximation (RMSEA) = .038, = .042 and = .039 for the combined, product brand and service brand models respectively.

I further analyzed alternative models by comparing the overall model to two simplified models: one in which there was no mediation of perceived threat and another in which there was no mediation of perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance (see Table 1). The results indicate that removing the mediators did not significantly change the overall fit of the model, therefore, I chose the hypothesized model with both mediators for further analysis.
Table 1. Comparison of overall model from Study 2 to alternative models.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Study2</th>
<th>Without perceived threat</th>
<th>Without perceived likelihood to restore BSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall from Figure 2a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>117.78</td>
<td>80.657</td>
<td>66.582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMIN/DF</td>
<td>1.785</td>
<td>1.753</td>
<td>1.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFI</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFI</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSMEA</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other notes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Blame is N.S.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With an acceptable model fit, I can proceed to examine the hypothesized relationships in the models. As predicted, within the context of strongly attached participants, larger perceived brand-self distance, lower extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and attribution of blame onto the brand, all predicted increase in perceived threat to the relationship with the brand for overall model (βs = -.35, -.35 and -.14, ts = -4.44, -4.44 and -3.89, ps < .001). These predictions were also supported in both product brand (βs = -.34, -.27 and -.17, ts = -3.05, -2.44 and -2.97, ps < .05) and service brand conditions (βs = -.29, -.44 and -.12, ts = -2.62, -3.85 and -2.34, ps < .05).

Further, greater levels of perceived threat resulted in lower motivation to restore brand-
self distance for overall model ($\beta = -0.17$, $t = -3.81$, $p < .001$) as well as for both product brand ($\beta = -0.19$, $t = -2.95$, $p < .05$) and service brand conditions ($\beta = -0.14$, $t = -2.12$, $p < .05$). As expected such greater levels of perceived threat also resulted in lower perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance for overall model ($\beta = -0.22$, $t = -4.11$, $p < .001$) and for both product brand ($\beta = -0.25$, $t = -3.36$, $p < .001$) and service brand conditions ($\beta = -0.18$, $t = -2.37$, $p < .05$). This in turn led to lower motivation to restore such brand-self distance for overall model ($\beta = 0.40$, $t = 8.47$, $p < .001$) and for product brand ($\beta = 0.41$, $t = 6.03$, $p < .001$) and service brand conditions ($\beta = 0.40$, $t = 6.24$, $p < .001$).

As expected, the greater extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and lower perceived changes to brand-self distance resulted in higher perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance for overall model ($\beta$ = .40 and .19, $t$ = 4.93 and 2.45 $p$ < .05), product brand ($\beta$ = .28 and .23, $t$ = 2.54 and 2.09, $p$ < .05) and service brand conditions ($\beta$ = .41 and 0.21 $t$ = 3.44 and 1.88 $p$ < .06). Finally, the greater extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance resulted in stronger motivation to restore brand-self distance for the overall model ($\beta$ = .34, $t$ = 6.18, $p$ < .001) and for both product brand ($\beta$ = .28, $t$ = 3.86, $p$ < .001) and service brand conditions ($\beta$ = .38, $t$ = 4.65, $p$ < .001) (Figure 2a, 2b and 2c). These analyses thus support the hypothesis $H_1$ through $H_7$; see Figure 2a-c for more details.
Figure 2a. Study 2. Combined brand condition: model estimation. (Standardized Solution; N=535)
Figure 2b. Study 2. Product brand condition: model estimation. (Standardized Solution; N=246)
The summary of results for Study 2 appears in Figure 2d and Table 2. The squared multiple correlations demonstrate that the proposed model explains fifty four percent of variance in perceived threat to relationship with the brand, fifty five percent of variance in perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance and sixty seven percent of variance in motivation to restore brand-self distance.
Figure 2d. Summary of results for Study 2: Combined brand condition (Standardized Solution; N=535)

*Note: χ²(66) = 117.78, p < .001; CFI = .99; IFI = .99; RMSEA = .038
"*" means p < .05, "**" means p < .01, "***" means p < .001
Table 2. Unstandardized, Standardized, and Significance Levels for Model in Figure 2a

(Standard Errors in Parentheses; N = 535)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Unstandardized</th>
<th>Standardized</th>
<th>Significance Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSD → Perceived threat</td>
<td>-.238 (.054)</td>
<td>-.346</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Relevance → Perceived threat</td>
<td>-.547 (.123)</td>
<td>-.354</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame: brand → Perceived threat</td>
<td>-.580 (.149)</td>
<td>-.143</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived threat → Perceived likelihood to restore BSD</td>
<td>-.277 (.068)</td>
<td>-.220</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSD → Perceived likelihood to restore BSD</td>
<td>.166 (.068)</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Relevance → Perceived likelihood to restore BSD</td>
<td>.779 (.158)</td>
<td>.399</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived likelihood to restore BSD → Motivation to restore BSD</td>
<td>.436 (.051)</td>
<td>.399</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Relevance → Motivation to restore BSD</td>
<td>.731 (.118)</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived threat → Motivation to restore BSD</td>
<td>-.238 (.063)</td>
<td>-.173</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To analyze $H_9$ and $H_{10}$ concerned with behavioural intentions, I conducted chi square tests in each of the brand conditions (product and service) but only among those who could be considered to be attached customers with relatively higher brand attachment as identified through a previous median split. To accomplish this, I did another median split on the motivation to restore brand-self distance and created a variable with two levels: low vs. high motivation to restore brand-self distance. Those who had higher motivation to restore brand-self distance reported much higher intentions to do nothing (product brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 30.25, p < .001$, service brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 36.54, p < .001$), buy the brand again (product brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 10.13, p = .001$, service brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 36.1, p < .001$), demand better treatment from the brand (service brand condition context only: (59 and 26) ($\chi^2(1) = 12.8, p < .001$) and “other” behavioural intentions (product brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 6.76, p < .05$, service brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 20.83, p < .001$). Higher intentions to do nothing were expected, as these are consistent with self-rationalizing mechanisms that customers may want to engage in in order to feel closer to the brand. Higher intentions to repurchase the brand are also consistent with previous literature on how customers with a strong brand attachment may maintain their brand-self distance (Park et. al, 2010).

I further investigated other behavioural intentions and analyzed the qualitative data collected to clarify the nature of these intentions. Almost all of the participants under the “other” category indicated that they would approach the brand in order to see if they could change the situation and receive a better treatment from the brand. This is one indication that most participants had increased their intentions to restore their brand-self distance. The increase in the above behavioural intentions within both the product brand and service brand conditions are, thus, consistent with the hypothesized relationship in $H_{10a}$ in that when motivation to restore
brand-self distance is high, participants increase their intentions to restore brand-self distance through an increase in intentions to engage in a number of positive, neutral and negative behaviours, such as demand and ask for better treatment from the brand, do nothing, buy brand again and complain.

There was also support for $H_{10b}$ in that when motivation to restore brand-self distance decreased, participants increased their intentions to end the relationship with the brand. As expected, this only happened within the product brand condition due to relatively low barriers to exit the brand relationship, supporting $H_{10c}$. Particularly, within the product brand condition, those with a lower motivation to restore their brand-self distance also had a much higher intention to exit or end the relationship such as through brand switching ($\chi^2(1) = 33.2$, $p < .001$). Within the service brand condition, as predicted, there were almost no behavioural intentions to end the relationship with the service brand or switch to an alternative brand. The difference between the two contexts makes sense given that the service brand presents a context in which there are much higher barriers to exit the relationship with the brand than the context presented by the product brand. It was also expected that under conditions of low motivation to restore brand-self distance and attribution of blame onto the brand, participants would increase their intentions to switch to a competing brand ($H_{10d}$). There was support for this prediction ($\chi^2(1) = 7.53$, $p < .05$).

Continuing with further analysis of $H_{10a}$, $H_{10b}$ and $H_{10c}$, as expected when customers with a strong brand attachment blamed a product brand for the perceived changes to their brand-self distance they reported an increase in intentions to switch from the product brand to a competing product brand (blame Apple vs. blame self: $\chi^2(1) = 11.92$, $p = .001$, blame Apple vs. blame other factors: $\chi^2(1) = 6.10$, $p < .05$, blame self vs. blame other = n.s.) as well as an increase in
intentions to demand better treatment from the product brand (blame Apple vs. blame self: $\chi^2(1) = 13.24, p < .001$, blame Apple vs. blame other factors: $\chi^2(1) = 13.24, p < .001$, blame other factors vs. blame self = n.s.). This was also the result for the service brand (blame QSB vs. blame self: $\chi^2(1) = 14.4, p < .001$, blame QSB vs. blame other factors: $\chi^2(1) = 3.31, p = .07$, blame other factors vs. blame self: $\chi^2(1) = 4.48, p < .05$). Higher intentions to exit the relationship are significantly more likely to occur when there is low motivation to restore the brand-self relationship and when customers no longer want to restore brand-self distance. It was also expected that when customers blame the brand for the changes to their brand-self distance, they would demand better treatment from the brand. This was likely due to the fact that customers would likely expect the brand to take responsibility for its actions and to resolve the situation. These findings support $H_{10a}$ in that for customers who attribute the blame for perceived changes to their brand-self distance onto the brand, their behavioural intentions of using company resolution options increase.

At the same time, when participants with strong brand attachment blamed themselves, they reported an increase in intentions to buy the brand again for both the product brand (blame self vs. blame Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 5.0, p < .05$, blame self vs. blame other factors = n.s.) and for the service brand (blame self vs. blame QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 15.2, p < .001$, blame self vs. blame other = n.s.) and an increase in their intentions to engage in “other” behaviours (for the product brand: blame self vs. blame Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 4.26, p < .05$, blame self vs. blame other factors: $\chi^2(1) = 3.2$, $p = .07$; for the service brand: blame self vs. blame QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 11.64, p = .001$, blame self vs. blame other factors: $\chi^2(1) = 8.17, p < .05$). Examining the answers to open ended questions about their intentions when looking at the “other” category of these intentions, participants almost
exclusively listed the fact that they would like to approach the brand and see if anything could be done to improve their situation.

These findings also hold within those participants who had high motivation to restore brand-self distance. For those reporting high motivation to restore brand-self distance, when participants blamed themselves for change to their brand-self distance they increased their intentions for “do nothing” (product brand: $\chi^2(1) = 21.16, p < .05$, service brand: $\chi^2(1) = 15.65, p < .001$), buy the brand again (product brand: $\chi^2(1) = 8.07, p < .05$, service brand: $\chi^2(1) = 14.22, p < .001$) and to develop “other” behavioural intentions (product brand: $\chi^2(1) = 4.57, p < .05$, service brand: $\chi^2(1) = 11.84, p < .05$). Again, the “other” behavioural intentions appeared to be mostly directed towards getting a better treatment from the brand. The higher intentions to do nothing were expected, as these are consistent with self-rationalizing mechanisms that may take place if customers blame themselves for perceived changes to their brand-self distance. Higher intentions to repurchase the brand were also expected due to the fact that customers blame themselves for changes to their brand-self distance and this is one of the ways they can resolve the situation.

It is interesting to note that participants had an option to code their expected behaviour as “demand better treatment from the brand”. Yet, most of the participants chose to click on the “other” category and specify exactly what they would do. Almost all of participants choosing the “other” category indicated that they intended to approach the brand in order to see whether they could change their treatment and receive better treatment from the brand. However, on further examination, these intentions were different from the “demand better treatment” option as most of those who chose the “other” category specified that even though they take the responsibility onto themselves, they still wanted to see whether they could get lucky and somehow reverse the
situation. The increase in the above behavioural intentions within both the product brand and the service brand conditions are, thus, consistent with the hypothesized relationship in $H_{10b}$ in that as customers attribute the blame for perceived changes to their brand-self distance onto the self, the intentions for self-resolving behaviours increase.

Finally, when participants with a strong brand attachment blamed other factors for the change in their brand-self distance, they reported an increase in intentions to buy the brand again (for product brand: blame other factors vs. blame Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 2.88, p = .09$, blame other factors vs. blame self = n.s.; for service brand: blame other factors vs. blame QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 9.31, p < .05$, blame other factors vs. blame self = n.s.) and, in the service brand condition, an increase in intentions to demand better treatment from the service brand (blame other factors vs. blame self: $\chi^2(1) = 4.48, p < .05$). These findings also hold when there is a high motivation to restore brand-self distance, when participants blamed other factors for perceived changes to their brand-self distance, they increased their intentions for “do nothing” (Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 9.14, p < .05$, QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 15.21, p < .001$), buy brand again (Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 5.33, p < .05$, QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 14.11, p < .001$), demand better treatment (QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 14.22, p < .001$) and “other” behavioural intentions (Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 4.57, p < .05$, QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 15.21, p < .001$), which again was mostly directed towards getting a better treatment from the brand. As expected, since attribution of blame entails shared responsibility for perceived changes to brand-self distance between brand and self, customers would likely increase their intentions to engage in a combination of self and brand-resolving behaviours. Thus, these findings support $H_{10c}$ in that as customers blame other factors for perceived changes to brand-self distance, the intentions for a combination of self and brand-resolving behavioural intentions increase.
4.7 Discussion

Study 2 supports the proposed hypotheses $H_1$ through $H_{10}$ of this thesis. Specifically, the findings in this study suggest that when customers with strong brand attachment perceive an increase to their brand-self distance, perceive changes to the attached brand low on self-relevance and blame the brand for the perceived changes to their brand-self distance, they feel a threat to their relationship with the brand, leading to either an increase or decrease in motivation to restore brand-self distance. These changes in motivation further lead to an increase in behavioural intentions to not only act positively but also neutrally and negatively towards the brand.

Study 2 has some limitations. First, the manipulations for attribution of blame to the self and to other factors within the product brand condition didn’t work. Thus, the additional support for hypotheses $H_{3b}, H_{10b}$ and $H_{10c}$ is needed. Second, the manipulation checks for self-relevance indicate that this manipulation worked. Yet, the mean differences between low and high self-relevance conditions are 0.87 (product brand condition) and 0.47 (service brand condition) on a 7-point scale. It is important to try to improve these mean differences and to see how this may affect the results of this thesis. Third, it is also important to make sure that the findings for the service brand context (QSB) are not due to order effects, especially since Study 2 participants first saw the product brand and then the service brand scenarios. Fourth, while I expected that the perceived brand-self distance and the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance have commonalities, I also expected to see independent effects for these constructs as in Sen, Johnson, Bhattacharya and Wang (2015). The correlation between the two constructs, however, was high in my study: $r= .81$ vs. 0.76 vs. 0.84, $p< .05$ for the overall, the product brand and the service brand conditions in contrast to the moderate correlation ($r= .50, p< .01$) found in Sen, Johnson, Bhattacharya and Wang (2015). Consequently, I needed to further improve on the manipulation
of these constructs to be able to achieve and demonstrate independent effects. Finally, Study 2 examined the predicted hypothesis in a limited context; thus, testing proposed hypotheses in different contexts would expand on the generalizability of this study and would benefit this thesis. To address the above issues Study 3 is necessary.

5. Study 3

5.1 Purpose of Study 3

The goal of Study 3 was three-fold. First, I wanted to improve the manipulations for attribution of blame, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and perceived brand-self distance. To do this, I ran a number of additional pre-tests. Second, I also wanted to make sure to eliminate any order effects that affected findings in the product and service brand context (QSB) as participants always first saw the product brand and then the service brand scenarios in Study 2. For this reason, participants were randomly presented scenarios in Study 3. Finally, I wanted to replicate findings from Study 2 in a slightly different context, expanding on the generalizability of this thesis’s findings. To do that, I used a scenario based on social comparison to another customer (“the second theme that emerged from Study 1a”) in a product brand context. As Study 3 closely followed Study 2, the purpose of the third study was also to examine the questions: “What factors trigger changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance?” and “How does motivation to restore brand-self distance affect behavioural intentions of customers with strong brand attachment?”
5.2 Participants

Two hundred and forty nine School of Business undergraduate students who voluntarily signed up for the study responding to a call on the research portal participated in this study. In recruiting the students, they were told that they could participate in the study if they currently have a relationship with Apple and QSB brands. Like in the previous studies, this group of participants was allowed to add points to their marks in one of their courses as compensation for participating in the study.

5.3 Design

Study 3 consisted of a 2 x 2 x 3 x 2 experimental design with two levels of perceived change to brand-self distance (small, large), two levels of the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance (high, low) and three levels of blame attribution (brand, self, other). These variables were manipulated in two separate brand conditions, a product brand (Apple) and a service brand (QSB). The strength of customer-brand attachment was measured in each of the brand conditions and served as a measured independent variable. All dependent variables were measured the same way as in Study 1b (Appendix 5) with a few exceptions in which an item was rephrased to be more specific to this study. For example, each measure for self-relevance began “This type of app” instead of “in this situation” , etc. The dependent variables were the same as in previous studies and were measured in the same way (Appendix 5).
5.4 Participant Selection and Sample Size

In recruiting participants, they were told that they could participate in the study if they currently have a relationship with Apple and QSB brands such that these brands strongly represent them as a person. Therefore, the three hundred and twenty eight participants who signed up for the study already had a strong brand attachment with the above brands. To verify this, I measured the strength of brand attachment to Apple (M=7.21; SD=2.14; on an eleven point scale) and QSB (M=8.26; SD=2.09; on an eleven point scale) before participants participated in the study. Since the participants’ strength of brand attachment was skewed towards strong brand attachment, I decided to use a mean split of this variable based on the 11-point scale. Those who had a cumulative score of 5 or below were excluded from the study due to low strength of brand attachment, leaving two hundred forty six and two hundred eighty nine participants in product brand and service brand context respectively.

5.5 Procedure

The participants first agreed to terms and conditions of this study. Next, the participant’s strength of brand attachment was measured using Park’s et.al (2010) measure (Appendix 5). Reliabilities for these scales were good (product brand condition $\alpha=0.76$, service brand condition $\alpha=0.92$). The participants were then advised that they will be reading two scenarios (Appendix 6) and that they should treat each scenario independently when answering questions. The respondents read and rated scenarios in random order. They were then randomly assigned to experimental conditions and presented with the manipulations discussed earlier (Appendix 4).

After seeing the manipulations, perceived threat to the relationship with the brand, perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance, and motivation to restore brand-self distance
were measured. Reliabilities were high for all these measures: perceived threat to the relationship with the brand (product brand condition $\alpha=0.90$, service brand condition $\alpha=0.88$), perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance (product brand condition $\alpha=0.91$, service brand condition $\alpha=0.92$), motivation to restore brand-self distance (product brand condition $\alpha=0.87$, service brand condition $\alpha=0.87$).

Participants were then asked to describe their likely course of action if they were in the situation described in the scenario. They did so in an open-ended form, by listing their likely reactions. As in previous studies, they further coded their answers into the most likely categories of reactions (Appendix 5): “I will terminate the relationship with brand X” “I will pay more to get a better deal” “I will complain to management” “I will complain to friends and family” “I will complain on the website” “I will promote the brand to others” “I will talk positively about the brand to others” “I will buy the brand again” “I will do nothing” “I will demand better treatment from the company” “I will switch to an alternative brand” “Other, please specify:______”.

In addition to this, the last section of the questionnaire included manipulation check measures for perceived change to brand-self distance, the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance, and attribution of blame. Again there were high reliabilities for these measures: Perceived change to brand-self distance (product brand condition $\alpha=0.84$, service brand condition $\alpha=0.87$), the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance (product brand condition $\alpha=0.94$, service brand condition $\alpha=0.95$) (Appendix 5).

*Manipulation checks:*

*Product Brand Condition*
The majority of participants correctly recalled the scenario they read. In the small brand-self distance condition, 90 % of participants correctly remembered reading: “you may download a 30-day trial of the full version of this app for free”, while 95 % correctly did so in the large brand-self distance condition: “you may download the full version of this app for $4.99”, ($\chi^2(1) = 124.2, p < .001$). There was a significant difference on the measured brand-self distance across the cells of the manipulated brand-self distance (small vs. large) (Means: 6.66 vs. 5.94, $t(174)=2.16, p <0.05$) suggesting this manipulation worked.

In the low vs. high self-relevance condition, 86% of participants vs. 94% correctly recalled reading: “the new app is very generic” vs. “the new app is very unique”, ($\chi^2(1) = 118.4, p < .001$). The measure of self relevance was significantly different across the cells of manipulated self relevance (low vs. high) (Means: 3.63 vs. 4.36, $t(174)=-4.44, p =0.000$). Again, this is evidence that the manipulation worked.

Additionally, in the brand vs. self vs. other attribution of blame conditions participants correctly remembered reading that Apple 83%, self 86% and app developer 95% was at fault. Out of those who correctly remembered the scenario, participants blamed the brand 81% vs. self 88% vs. other factors 73% ($\chi(4) = 177.2, p < .001$). This manipulation too was successful.

Service Brand Condition

In the small brand-self distance condition, 94 % of participants correctly remembered reading: “there are limitations on the number of students that can take this course”, while 78 % correctly did so in the large brand-self distance condition: “you further pre-register for this course and receive an email a few days later, saying that you are no longer able to take this course”, ($\chi(1) = 110.3, p < .001$). Participants perceived a significant difference on the measure
of self-brand distance across the cells of the manipulated brand-self distance (small vs. large) (Means: 6.99 vs. 6.10, t(205)=2.56, p< 0.05) meaning that this manipulation worked.

In a low vs. high self-relevance condition, 90% of participants vs. 94% correctly recalled the situation from the scenario: “the new QSB course is generic” vs. “the new QSB course is unique”, (χ²(1) = 148.84, p < .001). The measure of self relevance differed significantly across the cells of manipulated self relevance (low vs. high) (Means: 3.88 vs. 4.91, t(205)=-5.82, p =0.000). This suggests another successful manipulation.

Additionally, participants correctly remembered reading that QSB 89%, themselves 83% and federal government 88% was responsible for limitation to class sizes. Out of those who correctly remembered the scenario, participants blamed the brand 82% vs. self 84% vs. other factors 71% (χ²(4) = 185.1, p = .000). This manipulation worked.

5.6 Analysis

I ran a confirmatory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS that included all five latent constructs for the overall model (Figure 1). In this model, all items were restricted to loading on their predetermined factors and all factors were allowed to correlate with one another. To evaluate both convergent and discriminant validity, I examined the measurement properties of the constructs. The model estimates suggest that the measurement model has adequate convergent and discriminant validity. With regards to the former, all factor loadings were significant (all p’s < .001) and the average variance extracted by each construct was greater than 0.5 (brand self distance (0.71), the extent to which brand maintains self-relevance (0.69), perceived threat (0.51), perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance (0.76) and motivation to restore brand-self distance (0.51). These results suggest that the measures reflect adequate
convergent validity.

Further supporting this, construct reliabilities suggest internal consistency in the items used to capture each measure (reliabilities of product brand, service brand and combined brand conditions; perceived threat: $\alpha = .90, .90$ and .88, perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance: $\alpha = .89, .91$ and .92, motivation to restore brand-self distance: $\alpha = .91, .87$ and .87, the extent to which the brand keeps self relevant: $\alpha = 0.95, .94$ and .95 and perceived brand-self distance: $\alpha = .86, .84$ and .87). For the overall model, the average variance extracted by each construct exceeds their corresponding squared inter-construct correlation estimates. Given this, the measurement model appears to have adequate discriminant validity given that the items are much more closely associated with the construct that they are intended to capture than with other constructs in the model. Taken as a whole, this assessment suggests that the measurement model is acceptable.

Having established the acceptability of the measurement model, I then estimated three structural models (Figure 3a-c). I first ran an overall model (Figure 3a), using combined data from both product and service brand conditions. I then ran the same model separately in the product brand (Figure 3b) and the service brand (Figure 3c) conditions. All three models simultaneously test the proposed paths as shown in Figures 3a through 3c.

The fit indices suggest an acceptable model fit for each of the three models. Although the chi-square goodness of fit test is significant (combined: $\chi^2(66) = 90.89$, $p < .05$; product brand: $\chi^2(66) = 94.17$, $p < .05$; service brand: $\chi^2(66) = 80.60$, $p = .11$), other fit indices consistently suggest an acceptable model fit: comparative fit indexes (CFI = .99 combined, .98 product brand and .99 service brand), incremental fit indexes (IFI = .99 combined, .98 product brand and .99 service brand) and the root square mean error of approximation (RMSEA) = .031, = .049 and = .033 for
the combined, product brand and service brand models respectfully.

I also examined alternative models in a combined context only. I compared the overall model to two simplified models: one without mediation of perceived threat and another without mediation of perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance (see Table 3). The results indicate that removing the mediators didn’t significantly change the goodness of fit of the model, therefore I chose the hypothesized model for further analysis.

Table 3. Comparison of overall model from Study 3 to alternative models.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Overall from Figure 3a</th>
<th>Without perceived threat</th>
<th>Without perceived likelihood to restore BSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>90.886</td>
<td>58.107</td>
<td>60.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMIN/DF</td>
<td>1.377</td>
<td>1.263</td>
<td>1.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFI</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFI</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSMEA</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other notes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Attribution of Blame is N.S.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With an acceptable model fit, I proceeded to examine the hypothesized relationships in the models. As predicted, within the context of strongly attached participants, a larger perceived brand-self distance, the lower extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance, and attribution of blame onto the brand all predicted an increase in perceived threat to the relationship with the
brand for the overall model (βs =-.27, -.13 and -.55, ts =-4.77, -2.56 and -11.04, ps < .05). These predictions held in both product brand (βs =-.15, -.15 and -.61, ts =-1.73, -2.1 and -7.73, ps < .08) and service brand conditions (βs =-.34, -.15 and -.50, ts =-4.52, -2.21 and -7.78, ps < .05).

Further, greater levels of perceived threat resulted in lower motivation to restore brand-self distance for the overall model (β =-.12, t =-2.12, p < .05) as well as in product brand (β =-.12, t =-1.54, p = .1) and service brand conditions (β =-.11, t =-1.48, p = .1). Such greater levels of perceived threat also resulted in lower perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance for the overall model (β =-.41, t =-7.68, p < .001), product brand (β =-.47, t =-5.78, p < .001) and service brand conditions (β =-.32, t =-4.52, p < .001). This in turn led to lower motivation to restore such brand-self distance for the overall model (β =.60, t =9.79, p < .001) and for both product brand (β =.64, t =7.31, p < .001) and service brand conditions (β =.50, t =5.81, p < .001).

As expected, the greater extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance and lower perceived changes to brand-self distance resulted in higher perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance for overall model (βs =.21 and .29 ts =4.47 and 5.11, ps < .001), product brand (βs =.18 and .18, ts =2.52 and 2.12, p < .05) and service brand conditions (βs =.31 and .33, ts =4.81 and 4.45, p < .001).

Finally, the greater extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance resulted in the stronger motivation to restore brand-self distance for the overall model (β =.16, t =3.49, p < .001), product brand (β =.09, t =1.49 p = .1) and service brand conditions (β =.28, t =3.97, p < .001) (Figures 3a, 3b and 3c). These analyses support the hypotheses H1 through H7.
Figure 3a. Study 3. Combined product condition: model estimation. (Standardized Solution; N=383)
Figure 3b. Study 3. Product brand condition: model estimation. (Standardized Solution; N=176)
The summary of results for Study 3 is appears in Figure 3d and Table 4. The squared multiple correlations demonstrate that the proposed model explains fifty six percent of variance in perceived threat to brand-self distance, fifty four percent of variance in perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance and fifty nine percent of variance in motivation to restore brand-self distance.
Figure 3d. Summary of results for Study 3: Combined brand condition (Standardized Solution; N=383)

Note: $\chi^2(66) = 90.89, p = .023; CFI = .99;IFI = .99; RMSEA = .031$  
"*" means $p < 0.05$, "**" means $p < 0.01$, "***" means $p < 0.001$
Table 4. Unstandardized, Standardized, and Significance Levels for Model in Figure 3a

(Standard Errors in Parentheses; N = 383)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Unstandardized</th>
<th>Standardized</th>
<th>Significance Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSD $\rightarrow$ Perceived threat</td>
<td>-.205 (.043)</td>
<td>-.267</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Relevance $\rightarrow$ Perceived threat</td>
<td>-.138 (.054)</td>
<td>-.127</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame: brand $\rightarrow$ Perceived threat</td>
<td>-1.912 (.173)</td>
<td>-.548</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived threat $\rightarrow$ Perceived likelihood to restore BSD</td>
<td>-.325 (.042)</td>
<td>-.411</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSD $\rightarrow$ Perceived likelihood to restore BSD</td>
<td>.175 (.034)</td>
<td>.289</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Relevance $\rightarrow$ Perceived likelihood to restore BSD</td>
<td>.181 (.041)</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived likelihood to restore BSD $\rightarrow$ Motivation to restore BSD</td>
<td>.578 (.059)</td>
<td>.595</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Relevance $\rightarrow$ Motivation to restore BSD</td>
<td>.132 (.038)</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived threat $\rightarrow$ Motivation to restore BSD</td>
<td>-.089 (.042)</td>
<td>-.116</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To analyze $H_9$ and $H_{10}$ concerned with behavioural intentions, I conducted chi square tests in each of the brand conditions (product and service) but only among those who could be considered to be attached customers with relatively higher brand attachment as identified through a previous median split. To accomplish this, I did another median split on the motivation to restore brand-self distance and created a variable with two levels: low vs. high motivation to restore brand-self distance. Those who had higher motivation to restore brand-self distance reported much higher intentions to do nothing (product brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 6.13, p = .013$, service brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 2.79, p = .09$), demand better treatment from the brand (service brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 8.64, p = .003$), complain to friends and family (service brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 5.26, p = .022$), complain to management (service brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 4.45, p = .035$) and “other” behavioural intentions (service brand condition: $\chi^2(1) = 7.2, p = .007$). Higher intentions to do nothing were expected, as these are consistent with self-rationalizing mechanisms that customers may want to engage in to feel closer to the brand. Higher intentions to repurchase the brand are also consistent with previous literature on how customers with a strong brand attachment may maintain their brand-self distance (Park et. al, 2013). An increase in complaining behaviours was also consistent with expectations that, by complaining, participants may expect to get better treatment or vent their feelings to begin feeling closer to the brand again.

I further investigated other behavioural intentions and analyzed the qualitative data collected to clarify the nature of these intentions. Almost all of the participants under “other” category indicated that they would approach the brand in order to see if they could change the situation and receive a better treatment from the brand. This is one indication that most participants had increased their intentions to restore their brand-self distance. The increase in the above behavioural intentions within both the product brand and service brand conditions are
consistent with the hypothesized relationship in $H_{10a}$ in that when motivation to restore brand-self distance is high, participants increase their intentions to restore brand-self distance through an increase in intentions to engage in a number of positive, neutral and negative behaviours, such as demand and ask for better treatment from the brand, do nothing, buy the brand again and complain.

There was also support for $H_{10b}$ in that when motivation to restore brand-self distance decreased, participants increased their intentions to end the relationship with the brand. As expected, this only happened within the product brand condition due to relatively low barriers to exit the brand relationship, supporting $H_{10c}$. Particularly, within the product brand condition, those with a lower motivation to restore their brand-self distance also had a much higher intention to exit or end the relationship such as through brand switching ($\chi^2(1) = 10.89, p = .001$). Within the service brand condition context, as predicted, there were almost no behavioural intentions to end the relationship with the service brand or switch to an alternative brand. The difference between the two contexts makes sense given that the service brand presents a context in which there are much higher barriers to exit the relationship with the brand than the context presented by the product brand. In addition, it was expected that under conditions of low motivation to restore brand-self distance and attribution of blame onto the brand, participants will increase their intentions to switch to a competing brand ($H_{10d}$). There was support for this prediction ($\chi^2(1) = 5.67, p < .05$).

I further analysed the predicted hypotheses $H_{10a}$, $H_{10b}$ and $H_{10c}$. As expected, when customers with a strong brand attachment blamed a product brand for the perceived changes to their brand-self distance they reported an increase in intentions to switch from the product brand to a competing product brand (blame Apple vs. blame self: $\chi^2(1) = 3.78, p < .05$, blame Apple vs.
blame other factors= n.s., 10 vs. 5) as well as an increase in intentions to demand better treatment from the product brand (blame Apple vs. blame self: $\chi^2(1) = 3.26, p = .07$, blame Apple vs. blame other factors= n.s. (11 vs. 7). This was also the result for the service brand (blame QSB vs. blame self: $\chi^2(1) = 6.1, p = .014$, blame QSB vs. blame other factors: $\chi^2(1) = 4.46, p = .035$). Higher intentions to exit the relationship are significantly more likely to occur when there is low motivation to restore the brand-self distance and when customers no longer want to restore brand-self distance. It was also expected that when customers blame the brand for the changes to their brand-self distance, they would demand better treatment from the brand. This was likely due to the fact that customers would likely expect the brand to take responsibility for its actions and to resolve the situation. These findings support $H10a$ in that for customers who attribute the blame for perceived changes to their brand-self distance onto the brand, their behavioural intentions of using company resolution options increase.

At the same time, when participants with strong brand attachment blamed themselves, they reported an increase in intentions for “do nothing” (product brand: $\chi^2(1) = 4.33, p < .05$; service brand: $\chi^2(1) = 4.08, p < .05$), to buy the brand again for both the product brand (blame self vs. blame Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 2.67, p < .1$, blame self vs. blame other factors = n.s.) and the service brand (blame self vs. blame QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 4.77, p = .029$, blame self vs. blame other = n.s.) and an increase in their intentions to engage in “other” behaviours (for the product brand: blame self vs. blame Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 4.26, p < .05$, blame self vs. blame other factors = n.s.; for the service brand: blame self vs. blame QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 5.33, p < .05$, blame self vs. blame other factors = n.s.). Again, examining the answers to open ended questions about their intentions when looking at the “other” category of these intentions, participants almost exclusively listed
the fact that they would like to approach the brand and see if anything could be done to improve their situation.

These findings also hold within those participants who had high motivation to restore brand-self distance. For those reporting high motivation to restore brand-self distance, when participants blamed themselves for change to their brand-self distance they increased their intentions for “do nothing” (product brand: $\chi^2 (1) = 5.26$, $p < .05$; service brand: $\chi^2 (1) = 3.94$, $p < .05$), and buy the brand again (product brand: $\chi^2 (1) = 3.89$, $p < .05$; service brand: $\chi^2 (1) = 4.46$, $p = .035$). Higher intentions to repurchase the brand were expected due to the fact that customers blamed themselves for changes to their brand-self distance and this is one of the ways they can resolve the situation.

It is interesting to note that participants had an option to code their expected behaviour as “demand better treatment from the brand”. Yet, most of the participants chose to click on the “other” category and specify exactly what they would do. Almost all of participants choosing the “other” category indicated that they intended to approach the brand in order to see whether they could change their treatment and receive better treatment from the brand. Again, however, these intentions were different from the “demand better treatment” option as most of those who chose the “other” category specified that even though they take the responsibility onto themselves, they still wanted to see whether they could get lucky and somehow reverse the situation. The increase in the above behavioural intentions within both the product brand and the service brand conditions are, thus, consistent with the hypothesized relationship in $H_{10b}$ in that as customers attribute the blame for perceived changes to their brand-self distance onto the self, the intentions for self-resolving behaviours increase.
Finally, when participants with a strong brand attachment blamed other factors for the change in their brand-self distance, they reported an increase in intentions to buy the brand again (for product brand: blame other factors vs. blame Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 6.23, p = .012$ and for service brand: blame other factors vs. blame QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 4.00, p = .045$), for “do nothing” behavioural intentions (for product brand: blame other factors vs. blame Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 8.43, p < 0.05$), “other” behavioural intentions (for product brand: blame other factors vs. blame Apple: $\chi^2(1) = 3.57, p < 0.05$) and complain to friends and family (for service brand: blame other factors vs. blame QSB: $\chi^2(1) = 2.45, p = .10$). Higher intentions to complain to friends and family and “other” (as before these were mostly directed towards demanding a better treatment from the brand) behavioural intentions are expected as the attribution of blame onto a source other than the self or the brand is more ambiguous and complaining to friends and family or to the brand would allow participants to vent their feelings and feel closer to the brand again. Also as expected, since attribution of blame entails shared responsibility for perceived changes to brand-self distance between the brand and the self, customers likely increase their intentions to engage in a combination of self and brand resolving behaviours: “do nothing”, buy the brand again and complain. Thus, these findings support $H_{10c}$ in that, as customers blame other factors for perceived changes to brand-self distance, the intentions for a combination of self and brand-resolving behavioural intentions increase.

Finally, I examined possible order effects by running group analysis in AMOS. To do this I first created a variable for order effects with two sub-categories: product brand_service brand vs. service brand_product brand. In the “product brand_service brand” participants first saw and answered questions in the product brand condition they were then presented with the service brand condition. In the “service brand_product brand” sub-category, participants first saw and
answered questions in the service brand condition they were then presented with the product brand condition. The results from this model comparison (Chi-square = 5.559 with 8 DF, p = .692) suggests that imposing the additional restrictions of eight equal factor loadings across the order effects did not result in a statistically significant worsening of overall model fit. Thus, the model that specifies a group-invariant factor pattern is supported by the sample data.

5.7 Discussion

Study 3 supports the proposed hypothesis of this thesis and provides additional insight into the question: “What factors trigger changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance?” It supports the ideas that when customers with strong brand attachment perceive an increase to their brand-self distance (H1), perceive brand changes low on self-relevance (H2) and blame the brand for such perceived changes to their brand-self distance (H3a, H3b), they feel a threat to their relationship with the brand, leading to a consequent decrease in motivation to restore perceived brand-self distance (H4).

This study also supports the ideas that when customers with strong brand attachment perceive a small (vs. large) increase to their brand-self distance (H6a), feel a low threat to the relationship with the brand (H6b), perceive brand changes high on self-relevance (H6c), they perceive higher likelihood of restoring their brand-self distance, which in turn increases the motivation to restore such brand-self distance (H5). In addition, as customers with strong brand attachment perceive brand changes high on self-relevance, they feel an increase in motivation to restore brand-self distance (H7). This relationship is likely due to customers wanting to maintain the relationship with the brand they highly identify with. Thus, perceived changes to customers brand-self distance, the extent to which the brand maintain self-relevance and attribution of
blame for the perceived changes to brand-self distance seem to be the main drivers of changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance among customers with strong brand attachment.

Further, this study also provides insight into the following research question: “How does motivation to restore brand-self distance affect behavioural intentions of customers with strong brand attachment?” As expected, I found support for the predictions that as customers with strong brand attachment feel highly (less) motivated to restore brand-self distance, they increase their intentions to engage in a number of positive, neutral and negative for the brand behaviours (in relationship dissolution and brand switching) ($H_{9a}, H_{9b}$). I also found support for the predictions that attribution of blame for the perceived change to brand-self distance is a predictor of direction for these behavioural intentions among customers with strong brand attachment ($H_{10a}, H_{10b}, H_{10c}$).

This study also improved upon manipulations for attribution of blame, perceived brand-self distance and self-relevance and replicated findings from Study 2 in a slightly different context: social comparison to another customer, expanding on the generalizability of this thesis’s findings. This study also better captures the independent effects of perceived brand-self distance and self-relevance as these constructs are only moderately correlated ($r_s = .44, .40$ and $.51$, $p_s < .05$ for the overall, product brand and service brand contexts). Finally, this study showed that there are no order effects as participants saw scenarios in a random order, addressing the limitations of Study 2.

**Chapter 4: Summary and Discussion**

In this thesis I investigated the limitation of strong brand attachment as it relates to one of
the motivational mechanisms of brand attachment – the necessity to maintain brand-self distance. I argued that there are many perceptions of brand-self distance that indicate whether a person feels closer or further to a brand and that perceptions of brand-self distance, that leave the individual feeling further away (feeling more distant) from the brand, trigger a reassessment of the brand-self distance and, by extension, an increased motivation to act upon this perceived change to brand-self distance. These changes in motivation then lead to an increase in various types of behavioural intentions to not only act positively towards the brand (as in Park et.al, 2013) but also, under some conditions, to act harmfully towards the brand: retaliatory actions, problem solving complaining and relationship dissolution.

The potential for an increase in negative behavioural intentions towards the brand among customers with strong brand attachment constitutes a potential limitation that a strong brand attachment imposes on a brand. To understand this phenomenon my studies first addressed the question: “What kinds of company actions may constitute perceived changes to brand-self distance?”

In this thesis, I argued that one context in which the immediate perceived changes to brand-self distance could arise is when a company continuously implements customer prioritization strategies, and in so doing, creates a situation in which customers with strong brand attachment feel that the company’s actions are inconsistent with his or her perceived brand-self distance. More specifically, as companies use customer prioritization strategies, they vary the offers to different customer groups. This approach sometimes creates situations of inequitable treatment among customer groups.

At the same time, customers form perceptions of their brand-self distance based on their own experience with the brand, regardless of whether they belong to a high or low priority group,
and strive to maintain these perceptions of brand-self distance on an ongoing basis. Therefore, it would be expected that the implementation of a customer prioritization strategy by the company can lead to a situation in which a customer compares the company’s treatment to his or her brand-self distance and may, in some conditions, feel the company falls short, thereby leading to a perception of an increase in his/her brand-self distance (feeling further away from the brand).

I found support for the above predictions in Study 1a, 1b, 2 and 3. Study 1a identified themes that characterize the way in which strongly attached customers perceive what could lead to an immediate increase in their brand-self distance. Particularly, three situations in which strongly attached customers perceived an increase in their brand-self distance were identified, “sudden exclusion from the brand”, “social comparison to another customer” and “the brand is badmouthed”. The first two themes are of utmost importance to managers as this is something within their control and these situations could be avoided if necessary.

The first two situations mentioned above from Study 1a are the most relevant to an ongoing customer prioritization strategy. Within the first situation, participants with strong brand attachment to a product brand reported feeling an immediate perceived change to their brand-self distance when the company stopped supporting older products and changed components to only cater to newer models. In another instance, participants paid a discounted price for a service then suddenly found out that they were paying a higher price for the last couple of months without their authorization. Thus, an initial inclusion in the brand and later a sudden exclusion made participants perceive an immediate increase to brand-self distance. Within the second situation, some participants reported experiencing an increase to their brand-self distance through a social comparison to another customer. This happened when some customers were offered a certain treatment but a focal customer was not eligible for it.
These two situations were then tested experimentally in Studies 1b, 2 and 3. The results of these studies also supported that these two situations of “sudden exclusion from the brand” and “social comparison to another customer” in the context of customer prioritization strategy implementation were situations in which customers with strong brand attachment perceived an immediate increase in their brand-self distance.

While customers with a strong brand attachment may perceive an increase to their brand-self distance when a customer prioritization strategy is implemented, these perceptions may differ as to the extent of perceived brand-self distance. In this thesis I argued that the larger the increase the customers perceive to their brand-self distance (the farther away they feel) as a result of company actions, the more perceived threat to their relationship with the brand they will experience. I found support for this prediction in Study 1 and 2, using both service and product brand conditions. Specifically, when customers with strong brand attachment perceived a large change to their brand-self distance (feeling farther away from the brand), they also felt that their relationship with the brand was significantly more threatened. This higher perceived threat to the relationship with the brand was expected due to the fact that customers with a strong brand attachment derive their social worth based on how they are treated in the relationship with others. Therefore, the larger the brand-self distance customers perceived, the more threatened they felt.

Further, my research in this thesis also supported the idea that when customers with a strong brand attachment perceived immediate brand changes high on self-relevance they perceived a lower threat to their relationship with the brand. The rational behind this prediction was that customers might perceive changes to the brand (e.g. a new offering) as highly desirable, thereby maintaining the brand’s self-relevance. These changes would not interfere much with
their continuous goal pursuit and, by extension, they would only threaten the relationship with the brand to a lesser extent.

In addition, my studies also found support for the prediction that when companies provide a clear rationale by which customers can blame the brand for the customer prioritization strategy implementation, customers are more likely to experience a greater threat to their relationship with the brand. This was predicted because if customers believe that the company had an opportunity to not implement changes to the customer prioritization strategy but still made a deliberate decision to do so, customers were likely to perceive the company’s actions as more intentional, and thus would feel a greater threat to their relationship with the brand. Managers may use this finding in order to try and minimize the perceived threat to the relationship with the brand. For example, managers may try and provide a clear explanation for why a certain customer prioritization strategy is implemented in a way that may imply attribution of blame onto the customer or other factors or that there was nothing intentional in their actions to hurt the customer.

In sum, the research in this thesis supports the idea that different offerings tailored to different customer groups under a customer prioritization strategy may lead to perceived changes to brand-self distance among customers with a strong brand attachment. The perceived changes to brand-self distance (small vs. large) along with the extent to which the brand keeps self-relevant (high vs. low) and the attribution of blame (self vs. company vs. other factors) further affect the extent of the perceived threat to customer brand relationship. I found support for these predictions in Study 1 and 2, using both service and product brands.

It was also important to understand what consequences this perceived threat to the relationship with the brand might have. Recall, customers who perceive a threat to the
relationship with the brand experience distress, and depending on the situation feel a strong desire to either restore or increase their brand-self distance. In accordance with the expectancy theory of motivation (Vroom, 1984), I expected that customers with a strong brand attachment will likely be motivated to restore their brand-self distance when they believe that a restoration will lead to the desirable outcome of allowing them to continue to pursue goals associated with their brand attachment and that their efforts to restore brand-self distance will likely lead to its restoration.

I predicted that customers with strong brand attachment increase their motivation to restore their brand-self distance when the brand remains self-relevant. I found support for this prediction in Studies 2 and 3 with both product and service brands. More specifically, when customers with a strong brand attachment perceived the brand changes high on self-relevance, they reported higher identification with the immediately perceived brand changes, which then increased their motivation to restore brand-self distance. I believe this happens due to the fact that customers with a strong brand attachment are able to continuously pursue goals associated with strong brand attachment when the brand remains self-relevant. At the same time, when customers with a strong brand attachment perceived the brand changes resulting in low self-relevance, they reported low identification with the perceived brand changes, which hindered their motivation to restore brand-self distance. This is likely due to the fact that those customers’ ability to continue to pursue goals associated with their strong brand attachment was hindered.

I also expected that customers with strong brand attachment would increase their motivation to restore their brand-self distance when they perceived a low threat to their relationship with the brand. I found support for this in Studies 2 and 3 with both product and service brands. More specifically, customers with a strong brand attachment were more
motivated to restore their brand-self distance with the brand when they perceived a low threat to their relationship with the brand, and vice versa. This makes sense given that a low perceived threat to the relationship with the brand may also be perceived as easier to overcome, thus motivating customers to restore their brand-self distance to a greater extent.

Finally, in accordance with Vroom’s (1984) theory of motivation, it was expected that customers with a strong brand attachment would increase motivation to restore perceived brand-self distance when they perceived a high likelihood to restore their brand-self distance. Again, I found support for this prediction in Studies 2 and 3 with both product and service brands. Further, as expected, customers with strong brand attachment derived their perceptions of high likelihood to restore brand-self distance when they felt that the brand maintained its self-relevance, they perceived small changes to brand-self distance and a low threat to the relationship with the brand. These predictions were largely based on the idea that a low perceived threat as well as small perceived brand-self distance may be perceived as easier to overcome, therefore customers may perceive a higher likelihood of restoring their brand-self distance. At the same time, when customers with a strong brand attachment perceived brand changes to result in high self-relevance, they may believe that those self-relevant outcomes are still very desirable and, thus, may perceive a higher likelihood to restore brand-self distance.

It was critical to examine changes to the motivation to restore brand-self distance as these changes are expected to trigger a corresponding increase in behavioural intentions to either restore or increase brand-self distance. Based on the literature (Vroom, 1984), I expected that the more one feels motivated to restore brand-self distance, the higher his/her behavioural intentions to restore perceived brand-self distance will be, and vice versa. To restore or increase their perceived brand-self distance it was expected that customers with a strong brand attachment
under conditions of high motivation to restore brand-self distance would increase their behavioural intentions for a variety of positive, neutral and negative behaviours toward the brand. I found support for these predictions in both Studies 2 and 3, again using product and service brand conditions.

Those who had a high motivation to restore brand-self distance reported much higher intentions to do nothing (neutral brand behavioural intentions), buy the brand again (positive brand behavioural intentions), or demand better treatment from the brand (negative brand behavioural intentions) as well as “other” behavioural intentions (which were mostly comprised of behaviors directed at getting better treatment from the brand, which is similar to negative brand behavioural intentions).

The increase in all of the above behavioural intentions for both product and service brands are consistent with my hypotheses suggesting that when motivation to restore brand-self distance is high, participants increase their intentions to restore brand-self distance through an increase in intentions to engage in a number of positive, neutral and negative behaviours (such as to demand and ask for better treatment from the brand, do nothing, buy the brand again and complain). Given this, it is important for managers to take necessary actions to try and avoid these increases in behaviours, especially negative behaviours, from customers that care about the brand the most. To accomplish this, managers need to keep the brand high on self-relevance, minimize the possibility for a perceived increase in brand-self distance, and, if possible, provide a clear rationale by which customers can attribute the blame outside of the company’s control.

I also argued that customers with a strong brand attachment and with low motivation to restore brand-self distance would increase their intentions to switch to another brand or to exit the relationship. For instance, Studies 2 and 3 found support for the above prediction as this only
happened within the product brand context due to relatively low barriers existing to exit the brand relationship. Specifically, within the product brand condition, those with low motivation to restore brand-self distance had a much higher intention to exit the relationship through brand switching while some of these participants also indicated that they intended to end the relationship with the brand. Within the service brand condition, as predicted, there were almost no intentions to end the relationship with the brand or switch to an alternative brand. The difference between these two conditions makes sense given that the service brand (Queen’s School of Business) is a context that presents very high barriers to exiting the relationship with the brand. Thus, while the current literature on brand attachment documents that strong brand attachment protects against relationship dissolution (Park et.al, 2010), this research shows that under the above conditions strong brand attachment could also lead to an increase in intentions for relationship dissolution either through brand switching or by ending the relationship with the brand.

While the changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance drove the difference in behavioural intentions among customers with a strong brand attachment, attribution of blame for the perceived change to brand-self distance drove the direction of these behavioural intentions. Specifically, based on the existing literature on service failures (e.g. Richins, 1983; Curren and Folkes, 1987), I predicted that customers with a strong brand attachment would increase their behavioural intentions for brand resolving behaviours (self vs. shared brand-self) when they blame the brand (self vs. other factors) for the perceived changes to their brand-self distance. The logic for this was that customers would direct their behavioural intentions towards the source they believed was at fault and, therefore, also seek a corresponding resolution from this source.
I found support for this prediction in Studies 2 and 3, for both the product and service brand. As expected, when customers with a strong brand attachment blamed a product brand for the perceived changes to their brand-self distance they reported an increase in intentions to demand better treatment from the brand. I predicted this based on the fact that customers expect the brand to take responsibility for its actions and to resolve the situation. These findings support the idea that as customers attribute the blame for perceived changes to their brand-self distance onto the brand, intentions to act using company related resolution behaviours would increase.

At the same time, when participants with a strong brand attachment blamed themselves, they reported an increase in their intentions to buy the brand again, “do nothing” and/or to engage in “other” behaviours. Higher intentions to do nothing were expected, as these are consistent with self-rationalizing mechanisms that may be engaged if customers blame themselves for perceived changes to their brand-self distance. Higher intentions to repurchase the brand were also expected due to the fact that when customers blame themselves for changes to their brand-self distance, this is one of the ways in which they can resolve the situation. The increase in intentions for all of the above behaviours for both product and service brands are consistent with my hypotheses suggesting that as customers attribute the blame for perceived changes to their brand-self distance onto the self, the intentions for self-resolving behaviours increase.

Similarly, when participants with a strong brand attachment blamed other factors, they reported an increase in intentions to buy the brand again as well as increased intentions to demand better treatment from the brand. Since attribution of blame entails shared responsibility between brand and self for perceived changes to brand-self distance, it was expected that customers would likely increase their intentions to engage in a combination of self and brand
resolving behaviours. Thus, these findings support the proposed idea that as customers blame other factors for perceived changes to brand-self distance, the intentions for a combination of self and brand focused resolving behaviours would increase. Based on these results, attribution of blame outside of the company’s control seems to provide less negative behavioural intentions.

In sum, changes in motivation to restore brand-self distance as well as the direction of attribution of blame for the perceived change to brand-self distance were found to drive the difference in the resulting type of customers’ behavioural intentions among customers with a strong brand attachment. These are important findings as they highlight some limitations of strong customer brand attachments on customer prioritization strategies. My thesis research helps managers understand how customers with strong brand attachment may want to restore their brand-self distance, and, by extension, how to best manage this customer group.

In conclusion, my research suggests that customers with a strong brand attachment can perceive changes introduced in the ongoing implementation of a customer prioritization strategy as a threat to their relationship with the brand. Further, as a way of restoring their brand-self distance these customers may potentially increase their intentions for not only positive but also negative behavioural intentions towards the brand. Thus, while a strong brand attachment promises a lot of potential benefits for managers, it could also backfire if customers perceive an increase to their brand-self distance as a threat to their relationship with the brand. It is important that this limitation of a strong brand attachment needs to be taken into account by managers when designing a customer prioritization strategy.
Chapter 5: Contributions and Implications

The literature on brand attachment suggests that strong brand attachment can offer advantages to companies (such as loyalty, brand display, readiness to pay a price premium and other benefits; e.g. Park et. al, 2010). However, the issue of whether there are potential pitfalls of strong brand attachment remains relatively unexplored. This thesis introduces a note of caution with respect to strong brand attachment in particular as it relates to the necessity to maintain perceived brand-self distance. The studies in this thesis demonstrate that after a company introduces a change that affects perceived brand-self distance in customers with a strong brand attachment, these customers appear to increase their desires for not only positive, but also negative and neutral behavioural intentions towards the brand in order to restore their brand-self distance. This suggests that there are instances in which a strong brand attachment can become a potential liability.

More specifically, the current literature suggests that customers can maintain their brand-self distance by engaging in relationship-sustaining behaviours with the brand and that these behaviours are typically characterized as very positive for the brand. These relationship-sustaining behaviours may include, for example, brand re-purchasing, willingness to pay price premiums for the brand, and spreading positive word-of-mouth about the brand (Park et. al., 2010). Maintenance of the brand-self distance through the above behaviours helps customers avoid feelings of separation anxiety with the brand, keep strong pro-brand orientations (Bowlby, 1979; Hazan and Shaver, 1994; Feeney and Noller, 1996) and achieve self-relevant goals (Park et. al., 2011). However, this literature often investigates these behaviours as a means for customers to remain close to the brand (maintain or decrease brand-self distance) and not as a
means to also move away from the brand (increase brand-self distance) in reaction to company actions. In contrast, this thesis contributes to the above-mentioned literature on brand attachment by demonstrating more generally how customers with a strong brand attachment can react to changes in their brand-self distance that occur in situations in which the company implements certain changes to customer-related strategies. These reactions can incorporate not only positive but also neutral and negative behavioural intentions towards the brand, the latter of which comprise the liability of a strong customer attachment to this brand.

While current literature (Park et. al. 2013) assumes that perceived brand-self distance is a constant perceived distance between the brand and the customer’s self, this thesis sheds new light on this construct by demonstrating that there are also dynamic perceptions of brand-self distance. If these perceptions of brand-self distance are further away from the brand (increasing the brand-self distance), they can trigger a reassessment of the brand-self distance and by extension a motivation to act upon such perceived changes - possibly in a harmful way towards the brand.

There may be several company actions that can trigger this reaction, but in this thesis I examine one such context in which customers with a strong brand attachment can perceive an increase to their brand-self distance. This is the context of an ongoing implementation of a customer prioritization strategy. While the literature on customer prioritization strategies outlines their benefits and shortcomings from a profitability perspective (Homburg, 2008), my thesis contributes to the literature by adopting a more consumer-focused perspective to identify customers’ behavioural outcomes of a customer prioritization strategy. As I show, such an ongoing customer prioritization strategy implementation can lead to a situation of perceived threat to the relationship with the brand, increased brand-self distance and negative reactions to the brand.
Specifically, implementing an ongoing customer prioritization strategy can lead to a situation in which a customer evaluates his or her expectations of what a company should do based on their perceived brand-self distance and if he/she feels the company falls short it could result in the threatening of the customer’s brand relationship. Therefore, although a customer prioritization strategy separates customers into different priority groupings based only on the amount of worth that each customer represents for the company, the results in this thesis suggest that this strategy would also benefit from a consideration of brand attachment, especially as it relates to the necessity to maintain a perceived brand-self distance.

In this dissertation I focus on customer prioritization strategies as they relate to changes in customer offerings. I do not consider company actions as they relate to changes in brand image or corporate actions at a broader and more stable level. As an example, consider a well-known packaging disaster associated with the product brand Tropicana. About seven years ago, Tropicana tried to change their packaging and customers responded with strong protests. The company lost a fifth of their sales in a matter of weeks and was forced to change the packaging back to the original (Nisen, 2013). Although Tropicana’s actions is only one example of a brand action relevant to perceived changes to brand-self distance (e.g. changes in packaging, brand positioning, brand actions associated with corporate social responsibility), others are well documented in the media as are the results of such company actions. But it is not just the large scale company actions that can affect perceived brand-self distance. To demonstrate this, my thesis concentrates on more commonplace company actions as they relate to the immediate changes in customer offerings that can be perceived as changes to brand-self distance.

By investigating these more commonplace changes that result in perceived changes to brand-self distance, this thesis helps managers understand that even seemingly unexpected
changes such as lower brand accessibility or comparison of different offerings among customers could be perceived as threatening to customers’ brand relationships. Consider the three themes that emerged from Study 1a, namely: Social comparison to another customer; a brand is badmouthed; and lowered brand accessibility. Customers with a strong brand attachment perceived such trivial changes to the brand as something that would increase their brand-self distance to the extent that it could be perceived to threaten their relationship with the brand. Thus, investigation of limitations of strong customer attachment to brands in these contexts contributes to the literature on brand attachment by providing a better understanding of what factors can trigger changes in customers’ brand-self distance. This has previously not been examined in the literature.

The current literature on brand attachment suggests that once customers develop a strong brand attachment, the degree of that attachment can be changed over time through customers’ brand experiences (Park et.al, 2013). This is because customers’ strong brand attachment underlies their continuous goal pursuit and therefore they tend to pursue it and hold on to it until it is necessary to revise it. This thesis contributes to the above literature by demonstrating that there are situations in which customers with strong brand attachment may also feel a necessity to immediately revise their degree of brand attachment. Such situations are likely to occur when customers can no longer (to the same extent) continuously pursue other goals associated with their attachment to the brand.

While the current literature is mostly concerned with formation of brand attachment over time, this thesis also demonstrates that when customers perceive immediate changes to their brand-self distance as well as to the extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance, these customers, under certain conditions, may decrease their motivation to restore brand-self distance.
This could then eventually lead to various negative behavioural intentions such as relationship dissolution with the brand and/or switching to a competing brand.

Thus, while it may take a while for customers to develop strong brand attachment (Park et al., 2010), they can very quickly adjust their perceptions of brand-self distance and the extent to which the brand keeps self-relevant in reaction to a company’s actions such as lowered brand accessibility or non-desirable offering introduction. These perceived changes to brand-self distance and the extent to which the brand keeps self-relevant may eventually lead to the immediate adjustment of the strength of a customer’s brand attachment. My thesis work shows that such a possibility exists by demonstrating that strongly attached customers are very likely to have lower motivation to restore brand-self distance and, thus, higher behavioural intentions to end the relationship with the brand. This happens when the brand maintains low self-relevance and customers feel a large increase to their perceived brand-self distance.

Given that customers may form their immediate perceptions of brand-self distance as a result of changes implemented in an ongoing customer-prioritization strategy, brand managers need to consider how they may want to treat customers with strong brand attachment in order to avoid the very possible negative behavioural intentions. This opens the door for future research on a variety of topics. For example, it is important to investigate how companies can identify customers with strong brand attachments so as to better serve them. Further, it raises the questions of how managers could adjust a customer prioritization strategy in order to account for customers with strong brand attachments, as well as questions concerning what is the most effective and efficient way to manage this customer group. Additional questions for future research may include: What other negative effects could strong brand attachments pose, and how can both the negative and positive effects of a strong brand attachment be managed effectively?
Brand managers also need to consider and understand the brand meaning that strongly attached customers derive from the brand and the types of goals that these customers associate with that brand. Understanding such goals is essential for keeping the brand high on self-relevance when brand managers introduce changes to the brand. This knowledge may further be used to avoid new introductions of products that can reduce self-relevance of the brand among customers with strong brand attachment. Managers could also segment the market and their strongly attached customers based on the customers’ goals that the brand is satisfying, introducing changes to the focal brand according to these segments. This will help in avoiding situations in which customers with a strong brand attachment may perceive brands low on self-relevance and, by extension, increase their intention to end their relationship with the brand. Thus, more research is needed on what makes customers perceive brands high or low on self-relevance in the context of the perceived changes to brand-self distance that arise immediately after a brand change and how managers can introduce changes to the brand while maintaining high brand self-relevance among customers with strong brand attachment.

This thesis also shows that when customers blame the brand versus themselves or other factors for the perceived changes to their brand-self distance that occur immediately after a brand change, they perceive such situations as more threatening to their brand relationship due to perceived intentionality. This type of higher perceived threat to the relationship with the brand further leads to a lower desire to restore brand-self distance and, by extension, an increase in behavioural intentions to exit the relationship with the brand. In dealing with these potentially costly outcomes, managers might consider lowering the perceived level of threat to the relationship with the brand by providing information that lead customers to clearly attribute
responsibility for the implementation of the customer prioritization strategy onto factors outside the company’s control (e.g. themselves or other factors).

The results of the studies in this thesis also contribute to the literature on perceived threat (e.g., Brewer and Gardner 1996; Hogg 2003; Tajfel and Turner 1986) by identifying conditions in which these perceived threats to the relationship with the brand might arise, namely, the brand change results in low self-relevance, there is an increase in perceived brand-self distance after a change, and the blame for perceived changes to brand-self distance is attributable directly to the company. As I show, these factors could be perceived as threatening to a customer’s brand relationship and imply low social worth for customers with strong brand attachment. This brings a new insight to the literature on perceived threats because these factors have not previously been examined as triggers of perceived threats to the relationship with the brand.

Further, this thesis demonstrates the consequences that the above perceived threats to the relationship with the brand might have. Particularly, my research in this thesis shows that customers who perceive a threat to their relationship with the brand also feel a strong desire to restore or increase their brand-self distance. Such changes in motivation to restore rather than increase brand-self distance may lead to positive, neutral and negative behavioural intentions. Therefore, it is very important to understand: “What factors trigger changes in motivation to restore/increase brand-self distance?”

This thesis adds to an understanding of certain aspects of motivation (e.g. Vroom, 1984) by outlining factors that can trigger customers’ motivation to restore brand-self distance. These factors are high self-relevance of the brand, low perceived threat to the customer brand relationship and high perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance. These insights support the idea that customers are motivated to restore their brand-self distance when they believe that
the restoration will lead to the desirable outcome of allowing them to continuously pursue goals associated with their brand attachment and that their efforts to restore brand-self distance will, in fact, likely lead to its restoration. The results presented in this thesis supports the proposed motivational model in a different context. While Vroom’s (1984) model of motivation was largely tested in the context of organizational behaviour, this thesis demonstrates that the proposed motivational model also holds in the customer-brand relationship context.

Understanding these changes in motivation is important as they subsequently lead to changes in behavioural intentions, which could be harmful for the brand. Understanding these subsequent intentions of retaliatory actions is important and needs to be considered by managers, as these are potentially costly negative behaviours that can arise due to the necessity of customers with strong brand attachment to maintain brand-self distance after a brand change.

This thesis also contributes to the literature on brand attachment (Park et.al, 2010) by demonstrating that under conditions of high motivation to restore brand-self distance, customers with a strong brand attachment not only increase their behavioural intentions for positive brand behaviours (such as purchasing the brand again or talking positively about the brand) but also may increase their behavioural intentions for negative and neutral brand behaviours by voicing their concerns, complaining to management, complaining to friends and family and/or remaining indifferent (doing nothing) as a mechanism of brand-self distance maintenance.

At the same time, when there is a low motivation to restore brand-self distance, customers with strong brand attachment appear to increase their behavioural intentions towards switching to another brand or exiting the relationship with the brand. Thus, while the current literature on brand attachment (Park et.al, 2010) believes that strong brand attachment prevents relationship
dissolution, my thesis research shows that, under certain conditions, strong brand attachment could also lead to an increase in intention for brand relationship dissolution.

In this thesis, I further speculate that customers with a strong brand attachment increase their intentions to engage in voicing types of behaviours, such as complaining to management, to third parties, and/or to family and friends in order to restore their brand-self distance. While the literature (e.g. Grégoire and Fisher, 2008; Grégoire, Tripp, and Legoux, 2009) previously identifies many reasons for problem solving, complaining and retaliation to occur (e.g. feeling of betrayal, entertaining others, warning others), my thesis research extends the literature by identifying maintenance of brand-self distance as another potential reason for these outcomes.

I suggest that by voicing their concerns customers engage in behaviours to defend their brand-self distance because they may feel that engagement in this type of defensive mechanism in itself is a step in restoring brand-self distance. Further, by complaining to management, demanding to receive a better treatment, or complaining on the company’s website, customers feel that if these demands are met to some extent, and they will be able to partially restore their brand-self distance or at the very least defend the resulting brand-self distance. Finally, by complaining to their friends and relatives, customers may be able to vent their feelings, warning others and at the same time also defending their brand-self distance (even if this does not provide restoration entirely).

This thesis also suggests that certain strategies used by the company (particularly an ongoing implementation of a customer prioritization strategy) can lead to intentions for retaliation and, thus, while not yet recognized as situations of service failures, might need to be treated as such by managers. Consequently, while the use of a customer prioritization strategy may promise the company higher efficiency and effectiveness (Zeithaml et al., 2001), it can also
lead to increased costs for handling complaints, potential loss of existing customers, hardship in acquiring new customers and lessening the company’s reputation.

While this thesis investigated situations when customers experienced an increase to their brand-self distance (feeling further from the brand), future research should also look at the situations when customers perceive changes in company offerings (e.g. free special services, extra features etc.) as a decrease to their brand-self distance (feeling closer to the brand). Imagine, for example, a customer who arrives at a dentist’s office where a receptionist offers him/her free drinks and takes the time to talk about their charity work. This customer may immediately feel closer to the brand, triggering the motivation to act upon these changes. It would be very interesting to investigate this type of a situation and examine how the motivation to maintain brand-self distance would affect the customer’s behavioural intentions in this context.

Although this research discusses several novel findings, it is not without its limitations. This thesis’s conceptual framework inherently limits the number of potential factors in the model. Specifically, there may be different mechanisms of how customers with a strong brand attachment react to the perceived changes to their brand-self distance. For instance, this thesis demonstrates that under conditions of a perceived threat to the relationship with the brand, customers with a strong brand attachment increase their intentions for negative and costly consequences, including increases in intentions for retaliatory behaviours to restore their brand-self distance. However, there may be different mechanisms for customers to restore their brand-self distance that I did not investigate in this research.

One such mechanism is that customers may attempt to restore perceived brand-self distance using their more stable perceived brand-self distance as a standard by which they want to be treated by the brand, thus increasing their entitlement to receive better treatment from the
brand. This mechanism of restoring perceived brand-self distance would be very interesting to investigate in future research as this may be another limitation that a strong customer attachment imposes on a brand. While companies invest a lot of effort and resources in creating strong brand attachments, this brand attachment may potentially lead to an increased feeling of entitlement via demands for better treatment among customers with strong brand attachment.

Another limitation is that this thesis required certain trade-offs methodologically. More specifically, the method chosen for this study allows for testing psychological mechanisms described in the thesis. However, this method does not allow for studying effects of brand attachment on profitability of customer prioritization strategies. This is a limitation that can be addressed in future research.

Due to the use of student participants, it is not possible to know whether the effects described in this thesis will hold in an uncontrolled environment. Thus, a field experiment and or an experiment with different participant groups would improve this thesis’ generalizability. Further, in this thesis I only manipulated three variables, thus the causal inferences of this thesis with regards to the effect of perceived threat and perceived likelihood to restore brand-self distance on motivation to restore brand-self distance and on consequent behavioural intentions are limited. Since the strength of brand attachment is not manipulated but rather measured, causality inferences, as they relate to $H$s of this study, are also limited: the expectation that when customers are strongly attached and perceive a sudden change to their brand-self distance, they perceive changes to their brand-self distance smaller than those who are weakly attached. To further demonstrate and validate these causal linkages, more experimental studies are necessary.

Finally, practical constraints limited the capacity for testing actual customers’ behaviours as a reaction to the perceived brand changes. In order to maintain the control and precision
required to test each of the hypotheses, the adoption of scenario-based experiments made the most sense for the studies. These studies are limited as they only test behavioural intentions rather than the actual behaviours of strongly attached customers. Another avenue for future research would be to conduct a study allowing examine the actual resulting behaviours in a real world consumption context.
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Appendix 1 – Study 1a: Questionnaire.

Study 1a. Questionnaire.

1). Please, name the product brands and the service brands you currently own/use, which also strongly represent you as a person, such that:

- you feel that you are personally connected to the brand
- this brand is a big part of who you are
- the thoughts and feelings towards that brand come to you naturally and instantly

You can name up to 10 service and 10 product brands. As the names suggest, product brands represent something tangible (you can touch them), whereas service brands represent something intangible.

2). Please, think of one of the brands that represent you as a person. During your relationship with one of these brands, describe a situation in which you felt distant from it? Perhaps, you suddenly felt that the brand is further away from you?

3). Think about a brand you are attached to but at some point and time something made you question your relationship with that brand.

4). Maybe you felt the brand pushed you away.

5). Can you describe this situation in more detail?

6). Can you think of other situations in which one might feel distant from the brand? Maybe something that happened to a friend or a relative or something you can think of?

7). Keeping the brands you specified earlier in mind, what changes to those brands may make you feel further away from them.

8). What kinds of things this brand needs to do for you to feel that the brand no longer represents you as a person. It is no longer part of who you are.

9). When you felt further away from the brand, who do you feel was responsible for this distance?

10). Thinking back to those situations when you suddenly felt (might have felt) further away from the brand, can you describe situations in which you/the brand/other factors were responsible for that feeling of distance with the brand.

11). Please, tell me more on how you/the brand/other factors were responsible for the distance with the brand.

12). Please, describe different situations in which the feeling of distance with the brand you think was your fault, brand’s, other factors’.
13). Was there something in your relationship with the brand that you did and you are responsible for when you wanted to stop using the brand

14). Was there something that the brand did and is responsible for that made you want to stop using the brand

15). Was there something else that made you question your relationship with the brand, it wasn’t something you did or something the brand did but perhaps something else that contributed to these doubts in your relationship.

16). Going back to the relationship with the brands you outlined earlier and to the situations where you suddenly felt further away from the brand, please tell me about situations when you felt that the brand stopped representing you as a person.

17). Please, describe these situations in more details.

18). What was your reaction to the situations when you suddenly felt further away from the brand. How did you feel, what did you do?
Appendix 2 – Study 1a: Product and Service Brands.

Product and service brands named by participants in Study 1a as attachment brands. The brackets refer to the frequency with which these brands were named.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Product brands that strongly represent you as a person and you have an ongoing relationship with</th>
<th>Service brands that strongly represent you as a person and you have an ongoing relationship with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lululemon (4)</td>
<td>ARC (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dove (2)</td>
<td>Tim Hortons (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple (10)</td>
<td>Air Canada (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafter’s jam</td>
<td>Pizza Hut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom’s shoes</td>
<td>QSB (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackberry</td>
<td>BMO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>President’s Choice Financial (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymboree</td>
<td>Starbucks(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine West</td>
<td>MacDonalds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roots</td>
<td>Michaels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana Republic</td>
<td>Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estee Lauder</td>
<td>Domino’s Pizza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChickFilA</td>
<td>The Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nike (3)</td>
<td>Forever 21(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenovo (2)</td>
<td>Goodlife Fitness (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adidas</td>
<td>Costco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain Equipment Coop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aritsia (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph Lauren (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 – Study 1a: Situations of Perceived Increase in Brand-self Distance.

Situations of perceived brand-self distance (BSD) described by the participants in Study 1a.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEO of Lululemon responded to the see through pants incident as “Lululemon is not for everybody (meaning that people with big sizes shouldn’t stretch the closing)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A friend bad mouthed Dove as a brand (the focal attachment brand): saying that Dove is not a socially responsible brand because it is produced by the same company as Axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The passing of Steve Jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The price difference between Canadian and American Target stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A customer was unable to receive a coupon for Michaels because he/she is out of geographic area and was denied a discount that others were getting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Canada: changes to policies: paying extra for checked luggage, entertainment, food (found out about extra food charges during 5 hour flight)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick –Fil –A: when the restaurant hosted a family appreciation party strongly implying that they are against gay families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nike releasing too many collectable shoes too quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QSB (small intimate exclusive program with strong relationship building opportunities) expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple’s actions for fazing out old products. New products are no longer compatible with the old, do not sync and chargers need to be changed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stopped buying American Eagle because didn’t want to look young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barista at Starbucks was rude when the customer got the wrong drink, the barista sarcastically asked the customer: “are you sure you didn’t order this?” and then told another co-worker “she didn’t order this”, rolling her eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability issues with iphone chargers: 2 different chargers within 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Hortons ran by Sodexo (b/c of poor service, huge line ups, mixed up orders, inefficiency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodlife fitness workout class was cancelled due to small attendance of regular clients (the focal customer is in attendance).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodlife fitness workout class was cancelled due to small attendance of regular clients (the focal customer is one of the no shows)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodlife fitness stopped offering one of the favorite workout classes for the customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butteries for Mac broke and while typically it is replaced for free, she had to pay for it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President’s Choice Financial denied credit card and demanded a minimum income of 20000 per year while a friend got a card (with 0 income) 2 months ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aritsia’s sales promotions: from 98 down to 95$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogers’ changing pricing without informing, the price of caller id went up from 6$ a month to 16$ after the 6 months promotion was over, the customer was not notified (and other similar examples of extra charges)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A friend bad mouthed Canon brand (the focal attachment brand): saying that Canon’s products are far inferior to Nikon’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4 – Study 1a: Scenario Development.

Scenario 1. Theme 1, product brand: Apple.

“Imagine that you have a strong relationship with Apple and this brand really represents you well as a person. You frequently go on Apple’s Facebook page and read and write reviews on various new Apple features and products. This morning you check reviews on a new Apple product that is coming out. {Insert manipulation of self-relevance}. You read about the new Apple product for a while and …

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The extent of perceived change to BSD</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... decide to comment. At this moment Apple informs you that you may have some limitations on the number of comments you may post on Apple’s Facebook page.</td>
<td>... decide to comment. At this moment Apple informs you that your privileges to comment on Apple’s Facebook page have been terminated. You are no longer able to comment, nor write and read reviews.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The extent to which the brand maintains self-relevant</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You realize that Apple’s new product is very interesting and it goes well with your goals of being innovative. This product allows you to easily stay in touch with people you know and offers unique networking opportunities. You feel that such product shows Apple’s commitment to the “right” values in which you believe.</td>
<td>You realize that Apple’s new product is very generic and it doesn’t go well with your goals of being innovative. This product doesn’t easily allow you to stay in touch with people you know and doesn’t offer any networking opportunities. You do not feel that such product shows Apple’s commitment to the “right” values in which you believe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blame</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple further explains that the company is limiting its Facebook accessibility in order to reward only its most valuable customers.</td>
<td>Apple further explains that the company is providing accessibility only to those who agreed with the terms and conditions of its Facebook page. You forgot to agree with these, and you are now too late.</td>
<td>Apple further explains that the company is limiting its Facebook accessibility as a result of a new local legislation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scenario 2. Theme 2, product brand: Apple.

“Imagine that you have a strong relationship with Apple and this brand really represents you well as a person. You frequently purchase Apple’s products and enjoy trying out new features and gadgets related to Apple. This morning you received an email from your friend regarding a new
app available from the App Store and your friend has just downloaded the FULL VERSION for FREE. {Insert manipulation of self-relevance}.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The extent of perceived change to BSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You click to download the new app at which point Apple informs you that you may download the full version for free for 30 days only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Large</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You click to download the new app at which point Apple informs you that you need to PAY $4.99 to download this app.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The extent to which the brand maintains self-relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After reading online reviews, you feel that this app is very novel and innovative, and brings a unique customer experience. Thus, you decide to download it to try it out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After reading online reviews, you feel that this app is neither novel nor innovative, and doesn’t bring a unique customer experience. Still, you decide to download it to try it out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple explains that permanent, free full-version downloads are only available to its most valuable customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You suddenly remember that you forgot to register, which would have allowed permanent, free full-version downloads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple explains that the app developer limits access to permanent, free full-version downloads.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scenario 3. Theme 1, service brand: QSB.

“Imagine that you are about to start your last semester at QSB. Thus far you really loved your experience here and feel that QSB is a big part of who you are as a person. You feel very honored and proud to attend QSB. As usual before the term starts, you go online to register and select your courses. When logged into the QSB portal you notice a new QSB course that is being offered. {Insert manipulation of self-relevance}.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The extent to which the brand maintains self-relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After checking the new QSB course, you realize that this course is very interesting and it goes well with your goals for the program. This course allows you to meet leading industry professionals and offers enormous networking opportunities. You feel that such course shows QSB’s commitment to the “right” values in which you believe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After checking the new QSB course, you realize that this course is very generic and it doesn’t go well with your goals for the program. This course doesn’t allow you to meet leading industry professionals and offers limited networking opportunities. You do not feel that such course shows QSB’s commitment to the “right” values in which you believe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This course seems to be the only course offered this semester that could work well for your graduation timeline. In addition, you met a friend of yours who has already registered for this course. Thus, you decide to give it a try and register.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The extent of perceived change to BSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You further find that while spaces are available, there are limitations on the number of students that can take this course.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You find out that QSB limits the amount of students eligible to sign up for this course on the basis of priority to their most valuable students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 5 – Study 1b: Measurement Table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Measurement: items</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in perceived BSD (Park et al., 2013)</td>
<td>“with respect to how close the brand X is to me”</td>
<td>1= the brand X is moving away from me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“how personally disconnected do you feel from the Apple brand”</td>
<td>11= the brand X is remaining very close to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1= I am beginning to feel personally disconnected from the brand X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11= I remain strongly connected to the brand X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived likelihood of restoring BSD</td>
<td>“The situation makes me feel that I can remain very close to the brand X”</td>
<td>1=very unlikely to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The situation makes me feel that I can remain strongly connected to the brand X”</td>
<td>7=very likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The situation makes me feel that I can retain my previous relationship with the brand X”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The situation makes me feel that I can feel closer to the brand X”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which the brand maintains self-relevance (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Bhattacharyya and Sen 2003; Einwiller et al. 2006; Luhtanen and Crocker 1992)</td>
<td>The situation would maintain my strong feeling that …</td>
<td>1= strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…I’m associated with Brand X”</td>
<td>7= strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…I have a sense of connection with Brand X”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…I consider myself as belonging to the group of people who are in favor of brand X”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…customers of Brand X are probably similar to me”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…employees of Brand X are probably similar to me”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…brand X shares my values”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…being a customer of Brand X is part of my sense of who I am”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…purchasing Brand X helps me express my identity”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…brand X connected with a part of me that really made me tick”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…brand X made a statement about what was important to me in life”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to restore relationship</td>
<td>“After reading the scenario, I want to remain very close to brand X”</td>
<td>1= strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“After reading the scenario, I want to</td>
<td>7= strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| with the brand (Park et. al, 2013) | remain strongly connected to brand X”
    “After reading the scenario, I want to retain my previous relationship with brand X”
    “After reading the scenario, I want to feel closer to brand X” | 1=brand X
2= myself
3= other factors
1=brandX/myself/other factors are not responsible at all
7= brandX/myself/other factors are totally responsible |
| Attribution of blame (Grégoire and Fisher, 2006) | “In this situation, who do you think would be at fault?”
    “To what extent is brand X responsible for what happened?”
    “To what extent do you feel responsible for what happened?”
    “To what extent do you blame other factors for what happened?” | 1=brand X
2= myself
3= other factors
1=brandX/myself/other factors are not responsible at all
7= brandX/myself/other factors are totally responsible |
| Behavioral intentions | Given the situation in the scenario, please answer as honest as possible:
    “What would you do in this situation:” | open ended response |
| Behavioral intentions coded | Given your answer above, please choose as many as your answer can relate to: | 1= I will terminate the relationship with brand X
2= I will pay more to get better deal
3= I will complain to management
4= I will complain to friends and family
5= I will complain on the website
6= I will promote the brand to others
7= I will talk positively about the brand to others
8= I will buy the brand again
9= I will do nothing
10= I will demand better treatment from the company
11= I will switch to an alternative brand
12= Other, please specify:_______ |
| Perceived threat to the relationship with the brand (Aquino and Douglas, 2003) | “This situation made me feel like Brand X (the company) disliked me and the relationship I have with Brand X”
    “This situation made me feel like Brand X (the company) thought about my relationship with Brand X as being inferior” | 1= not true at all
7= very true |
| The | “To what extent do you feel that you are” | 1= not at all |
| Strength of brand attachment (Park et al., 2010) | Personally connected to Brand X?  
“To what extent is Brand X part of you and who you are?”  
“To what extent are your thoughts and feelings towards Brand X often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?”  
“To what extent do your thoughts and feelings towards Brand X come to you naturally and instantly?” | 11=completely |
Appendix 6 – Study3: Scenarios.

Scenario 2. Theme 2, product brand: Apple.

“Imagine that you have a strong relationship with Apple and this brand really represents you well as a person. You frequently purchase Apple’s products and enjoy trying out new features and gadgets related to Apple. This morning you got a message from your friend. He tells you he received an email from Apple in regards to a new app from the company. He says the email he received also gave him access to download the full version of this app for free. {Insert manipulation of self-relevance}.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The extent of perceived change to BSD</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You click to download the new app at which point you are informed that you may download a 30-day trial of the full version of this app for free.</td>
<td></td>
<td>You click to download the new app at which point you are informed that you may download the full version of this app for $4.99.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The extent to which the brand maintains self-relevant</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As you are an innovative person who likes cutting edge technology and enjoys keeping in touch with people, you go online to look for more information on the new app. After reading online reviews, you feel that this app is very unique and interesting and clearly appeals to you as an innovative person. It also allows you to easily stay in touch with people you know and offers networking opportunities, which strongly aligns with your goals of being unique, connected and innovative. You feel that this app clearly provides you with the types of things you are looking for in an app. Thus, you decide to download it.</td>
<td></td>
<td>As you are an innovative person who likes cutting edge technology and enjoys keeping in touch with people, you go online to look for more information on the new app. After reading online reviews, you feel that this app is very generic and plain and does not really appeal to you as an innovative person. It also does not easily allow you to stay in touch with people you know and does not offer any unique networking opportunities, which does not really align with your goals of being unique, connected and innovative. You do not feel that this app necessarily provides you with the types of things you are looking for in an app. Still, you decide to download it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blame</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After checking further into this, you find out that as part of a working agreement, it is Apple and not the app developer who sets the rules for downloading. For this app, Apple decided that permanent, free full-version downloads would only be</td>
<td></td>
<td>You suddenly recall that the full version of this app was free for the first one million users, and you remember receiving at least six emails reminding you of this, which you ignored.</td>
<td>After checking further into this, you find out that as part of a working agreement, it is the app developer and not Apple who sets the rules for downloading and strict instructions to limit the availability of a free, full version download to only a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scenario 3. Theme 1, service brand: QSB.

“Imagine that you are about to start your last semester at QSB. Thus far you really loved your experience here and feel that QSB is a big part of who you are as a person. You feel very honored and proud to attend QSB. As usual before the term starts, you go online to register and select your courses. When logged into the QSB portal you notice a new QSB course that is being offered. {Insert manipulation of self-relevance}.”

| The extent to which the brand keeps self-relevant |
|------------------|------------------|
| **High**         | **Low**          |
| After checking the new QSB course, you realize that this course is very interesting and it goes well with your goals for the program. This course allows you to meet leading industry professionals and offers enormous networking opportunities. You feel that such course shows QSB’s commitment to the “right” values in which you believe. | After checking the new QSB course, you realize that this course is very generic and it doesn’t go well with your goals for the program. This course doesn’t allow you to meet leading industry professionals and offers limited networking opportunities. You do not feel that such course shows QSB’s commitment to the “right” values in which you believe. |

This course seems to be the only course offered this semester that could work well for your graduation timeline. In addition, you met a friend of yours who has already registered for this course. Thus, you decide to give it a try and register.

| The size of perceived change to BSD |
|------------------|------------------|
| **Small**        | **Large**        |
| You further find that while spaces are available, there are limitations on the number of students that can take this course. | You further pre-register for this course and receive an email a few days later, saying that you are no longer able to take this course. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You find out that QSB limits the amount of students eligible to sign up for this course on the basis of priority to their most valuable students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
March 11, 2015

Ms. Svetlana Davis
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Business
Queen's University
Goodes Hall
143 Union Street
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

GREB Romeo #: 6003324
Title: "GBUS-216-09 - The Impact of Customer Prioritization Strategy on Words of Mouth Behaviours"

Dear Ms. Davis:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB) has reviewed and approved your request for renewal of ethics clearance for the above-named study. This renewal is valid for one year from March 13, 2015. Prior to the next renewal date you will be sent a reminder memo and the link to ROMEO to renew for another year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period. An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours. Report to GREB through either ROMEO Event Report or Adverse Event Report Form at http://www.queensu.ca/oro/researchethics/GREB/forms.html.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementation of new aspects into the study procedures. Your request for protocol changes will be forwarded to the appropriate GREB reviewers and/or the GREB Chair. Please report changes to GREB through either ROMEO Event Reports or the Ethics Change Form at http://www.queensu.ca/oro/researchethics/GREB/forms.html.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.: Dr. Peter Dacin, Faculty Supervisor
    Dr. Pamela Murphy, Chair, Unit REB
    Ms. Amy Marshall, c/o Research Office
Dear Ms. Davis:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB) has reviewed and approved your request for renewal of ethics clearance for the above-named study. This renewal is valid for one year from March 13, 2012. Prior to the next renewal date you will be sent a reminder memo and the link to ROMEO to renew for another year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period. An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours. Report to GREB through either ROMEO Event Report or Adverse Event Report Form at http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementation of new aspects into the study procedures. Your request for protocol changes will be forwarded to the appropriate GREB reviewers and/or the GREB Chair. Please report changes to GREB through either ROMEO Event Reports or the Ethics Change Form at http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.c.: Dr. Peter Dacin, Faculty Supervisor
Dr. Jane Webster, Chair, Unit REB
Amy Marshall, c/o Research Office
February 15, 2013

Ms. Svetlana Davis  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Queen’s School of Business  
Queen's University  
Kingston, ON  K7L 3N6

GREB Romeo #: 6003324  
Title: "GBUS-216-09 - The Impact of Customer Prioritization Strategy on Words of Mouth Behaviours"

Dear Ms. Davis:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB) has reviewed and approved your request for renewal of ethics clearance for the above-named study. This renewal is valid for one year from March 13, 2013. Prior to the next renewal date you will be sent a reminder memo and the link to ROMEO to renew for another year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period. An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours. Report to GREB through either ROMEO Event Report or Adverse Event Report Form at http://www.queensu.ca/orserchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementation of new aspects into the study procedures. Your request for protocol changes will be forwarded to the appropriate GREB reviewers and/or the GREB Chair. Please report changes to GREB through either ROMEO Event Reports or the Ethics Change Form at http://www.queensu.ca/orserchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

John Freeman, Ph.D.  
Professor and Acting Chair  
General Research Ethics Board

c.c.: Dr. Peter Dacin, Faculty Supervisor  
Dr. Jane Webster, Chair, Unit REB  
Amy Marshall, c/o Research Office